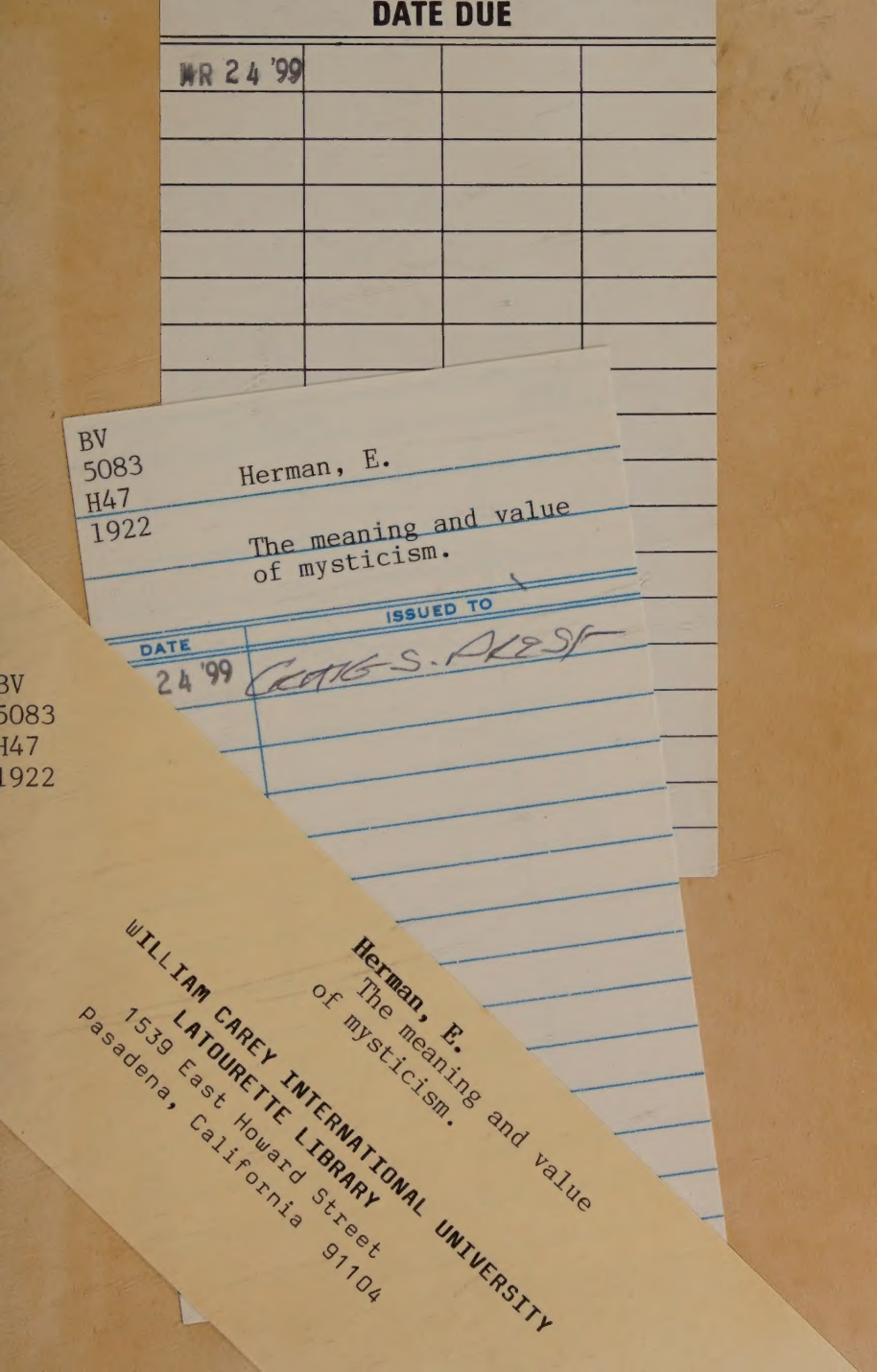
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THE MEANING AND VALUE OF MYSTICISM

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THE MEANING AND VALUE OF MYSTICISM

BY

E. HERMAN

AUTHOR OF "CREATIVE PRAYER," "EUCKEN AND BERGSON," ETC.

With Ear is to Universal Beauty, to Eternal One Eaton

THIRD EDITION

LONDON

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PREFACE

It has become a platitude to speak of a mystical revival, but so far it has been a revival of interest in Mysticism rather than of Mysticism itself. In spite of the remarkable output of literature on Mysticism within the last few years, we have few first-hand mystics among us, very few who can speak with authority and not as the scribes. Nor are there any indications of a revival of mystical religion among "the simple and the pure, into whose hearts Truth falls like dew into a fleece of wool." Such a revival was, indeed, hoped for by many as a result of the general reaction from ecclesiastical authority and traditional theology, but up to the present these expectations have not been realised. On the contrary, the weakening of traditional bonds has been accompanied by an alarming degree of spiritual mediocrity, strangely yoked to a superficial spiritual alertness and power of assimilation which create the impression of an age "haunted by the Unseen." Never was there such a stinging curiosity abroad regarding the most private sanctities of the spiritual life. Conversion, prayer, "interior quiet," recollection, contemplation, vision, the life beyond, are investigated by mixed multitudes with a blend of Athenian inquisitiveness and pathetic credulity. Mysticism has become a word to conjure with, and

any and everything that is sweetly unreasonable or piquantly obscure is welcomed in its name and exalted to the dignity of a more or less esoteric cult. Here and there we have felt the first stirrings of a yet unborn movement towards genuine Mysticism, but the most salient characteristic of the situation as a whole has been a fatal quickness of superficial appreciation which mistakes its enjoyment of the report of an experience for the possession of its reality.

But with the sudden outbreak of war new possibilities have entered into the situation, and what was curiosity, or, at most, a vague wistfulness, is being purged and transformed into a new wonder, a deep hunger and thirst for Reality. Much was talked in the days before the war about the delusion and peril of a materialistic civilisation and the refuge which "the simple life" and "the mystic quest" offered to disillusionised and wearied spirits. To-day what was then an armchair philosophy is being deepened into a vital conviction. We see in the case of Germany a great materialistic civilisation, which has dared to be true to its ruthless self, dying of its own brutal logic. We know now what once we merely theorised about —that a materialistic system cannot survive in a spiritual universe; that we are set in a world in which man cannot live by bread alone, even though each loaf be guaranteed by a militarist State. Moreover, this grim apocalypse of a nation which has clothed brute force with the philosopher's mantle and the preacher's gown has most effectually shattered the cherished superstition that "it doesn't matter what a man believes." To read essays upon the

beauty of ideas, the power of ideals and of dreams, is one thing; to feel their explosive force, as we are feeling it now, is quite another. Our reassuring conviction as to the futility of "mere" thought and our brave contempt of the professorial mind have been broken against the rock of history. The pragmatist has seen the impossible happen. He has seen abstract theories do concrete damage, and "pure" thought blast the foundations of a world. And out of this sudden, ruthless shattering of our pragmatist fiction, there will spring, not, indeed, a new intellectualism, but a rehabilitation of the higher Reason. And it is in the due honouring of this higher Reason that Mysticism will at last come into its own.

For, say what we will, Mysticism can thrive on pragmatist, voluntarist, or intuitionalist soil as little as it could thrive in the stony ground of intellectualism. True, the great mystics were certainly intuitionalists; nevertheless they were the product of ages in which Reason was "king." Platonism, Scholasticism, the Renaissance—these were the background of the mystic portrait, and it is only out of such a background of speculative thought and intellectual struggle that Mysticism can arise. Intuition sinks swiftly to decadence and morbid degeneration, unless it grows a magic blossom on the tough stalk of intellect. One much-needed conviction will emerge out of the present upheaval as it affects our spiritual life—that it is sheer futility to oppose the mystical to the intellectual or institutional elements of religion, as claiming an exclusive right to spiritual apprehension and fruition. There is no such thing as a "pure"

mystic; where he exists, he belongs to the realm of pathology. If the great clash of ideas teaches us that the thing that matters most—nay, the only thing that matters—is that strange, mysterious life behind the brain that cries out for the living God, it also teaches us that that interior life is not isolated, but has its deep roots in many worlds.

I believe, then, that out of the confusion and bitter mental anguish that cloud our souls to-day there is arising a deep and genuine desire for contact with the Eternal, a humble and resolute purpose to have done with pretty illusions and to grip Reality with naked hands. More especially will men everywhere begin to respond to the message of a truly Christian Mysticism—that is, a Mysticism whose passion for intimacy with God is checked by the Christian sense of sin, based upon a deeply ethical conception of salvation and sanctity, and born of a vision of God as He is in Christ Jesus. Sudden contact with grim realities may, and very likely will, make men even less tolerant of ecclesiastical and theological conventions than they were before, but it will likewise make them more suspicious of the preciosity, mock esotericism, and cheap transcendentalism of fashionable, heterodox cults, and far more open to the appeal of an experience of spiritual immediacy founded upon the realities of the Christian Gospel. The present book is based upon such a reading of the situation.

In the many volumes on Mysticism which have appeared recently, one of two methods has been followed—the historical or the psychological. Both are indispensable for our understanding of the subject,

but each taken by itself has its grave disadvantages. The historical method, in presenting the great mystics embedded, as it were, in the matrix of their times, tends to regard Mysticism as indissolubly bound up with certain classic forms and definite theological and philosophical presuppositions. The psychological method, on the other hand, based upon a timelessness of Mysticism which makes Plotinus the true contemporary of Francis Thompson, is apt to leave us with a vague abstraction. Neither of the two, if rigidly followed, tells us how to make the great mystical heritage available for our own day and generation, and how to link it up to the plastic, living movements of the present time.

In this book I have endeavoured to suggest the meaning and value of Mysticism for our day. My conviction that Mysticism is essentially a spirit and not a system, or even a method, has precluded anything like a detailed application of mystical principles to the movements of to-day. But I have at all points tried to show how the mystical element may be brought to bear upon the Christian thought and life of to-day, and to suggest where its dynamic and transmuting power can go to shape the Christian thought and life of to-morrow.

I have thought it well to devote the first five chapters entirely to the elucidation of the nature of Mysticism, the resolving of some of its inherent antinomies, and the removal of difficulties, obscurities, and ambiguities which stand in the way of intelligent discussion. These are followed by a study of a typical mystic, my choice falling upon Blessed Angela de

Foligno as exhibiting the characteristic weaknesses as well as the characteristic strength of Mysticism. The remaining five chapters deal with the relation of Mysticism to Nature, Philosophy and Theology. In the discussion of the mystical attitude to Nature, Asceticism and its significance for us to-day is specially considered; the chapter on Mysticism and Philosophy deals, *inter alia*, with the relation of experience and intuition to intellectual synthesis. In treating of Mysticism and Theology, the problem of the relation of Mysticism to Eschatology seemed to demand a chapter to itself. In it I have tried to show how, on the one hand, Mysticism will prove the only solution of the eschatological problem, and how, on the other, that problem is not solved, but rather aggravated, by a total transmutation of eschatology into Mysticism. In this connection I have attempted a brief discussion of the obscure doctrine of the Holy Assembly or Interior Church, which seems to me to have an unexplored eschatological reference. I have added a brief annotated Bibliography for the convenience of those to whom an exhaustive list would only prove confusing.

I need hardly say that I make no claim to exhaustive treatment. Within the prescribed limits of a volume such as this, one can only offer a broad and suggestive presentation of a subject, any one aspect of which would need a whole volume for its full and detailed exposition. This applies especially to the section on Mysticism and Theology, where I have endeavoured to suggest lines of thought which I hope to elaborate at some future time.

PREFACE

My indebtedness to previous writers is very considerable, and I wish first and foremost to record my deep obligation to Dean Inge, to whose writings on Mysticism I owe my first insight into the subject. With him I would couple an earlier writer, Professor Alexander V. G. Allen, whose well-known book, *The Continuity of Christian Thought*, exercised a formative and permanent influence upon my thinking. I have also, in common with all students of Mysticism, to acknowledge my indebtedness to the erudite and penetrative work of Baron von Hügel. Of other writers to whom I owe much stimulus, both by way of fruitful suggestion and by the provocation of dissent, I would specially mention Dr. Rufus M. Jones and Miss Evelyn Underhill. The names of many others of whose work I have availed myself are referred to in the body of the book.

My warmest thanks are due to the Rev. Ivor J. Roberton, M.A., for his kindness in reading the proofs and for many valuable suggestions.

E. H.

London,
October, 1915.

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

The demand for a second edition within eight months of publication, and that at a time when even the most absorbed dreamer is being stabbed broad awake by the harsh actualities of the War, seems to

demonstrate that genuine concern about inward religion which I ventured to assume in the preface to the first edition. To many these great and terrible days have laid bare the things by which men live. Deeper than our horror at the sudden apocalypse of evil which Germany has flashed upon the world, deeper even than the spirit of heroic devotion and unsparing sacrifice which the call of an Empire pledged to the highest ideals has evoked among us, is the dawning realisation of spiritual need, and the hunger for communion with the living God which is finding a voice in so many quarters. It is this conviction which, in the midst of so much that saddens and perplexes, makes one humbly glad to live in this difficult and splendid day.

I would take this opportunity of thanking the many reviewers who have accorded to this book so cordial and generous a reception and, while belonging to widely varying schools of thought, have been at one in their sympathetic understanding of the writer's intention and ideal.

For the purposes of this edition, I have only been able to correct a few errors in the text and to make some additions to the Bibliography (pp. 387, 388), including some important books which have appeared since it was first issued.

E. H.

LONDON,
June, 1916.

PREFACE TO THE THIRD EDITION

It is now seven years since this book was first published. During these seven years the face of life has wondrously changed for us. Some would say that the years of strain and stress from which we hoped so much have brought only the shattering of these hopes. Others would maintain that it was idle to expect even so grim an experience as world-war to change what will remain the same to the end of time—the human heart. Only a few would dare to say that there has been a radical change for the better.

But it seems to me that there has been a change for the better—the more radical because not easily observable. The dark hour has passed, and proved to be the turning point of the darkness, the hour before the dawn. But the dawn comes to the mountain tops before it lightens the plain and pierces the darkness of the valley. And our newspapers and books on social and political questions deal only with the grey plain and the dark valley. They tell us of the broad levels of national and social life; they cannot, of necessity, give any report of life on the heights. To discern that life one must go to the hidden souls that are the salt of the earth and the leaven of a languid Church. I make bold to say that there are more such to-day than before the war. I have marked their growing influence, not only in the Church but in a world that professes to despise them.

These souls, and the many others who follow their footsteps, if only from afar, are to-day turning, as perhaps never before, to the great masters of the spiritual life, the mystics. As never before they can appreciate that love of poverty, obscurity and humiliation which is the hall-mark of the mystic character. They know that as long as a soul seeks comfort, honour, praise, and popularity, it cannot hold intimate communion with the God who became man and took upon Himself the form of a servant, and was despised and rejected of men. Before the war comfort and ease were considered quite compatible with the most spiritual religion, and luxurious ladies read S. Teresa and S. Catherine of Siena in their armchairs without a qualm. To-day there are few readers of spiritual literature who do not suspect, deep down in their hearts, that it is futile to seek the experience of a S. Teresa or a S. Catherine without living the kind of life they lived.

That this introduction to the mystics may still be of use to those who turn longing eyes to a form of religion which involves a life of unreserved self-oblation is my earnest desire.

E. Herman.

London,
June, 1922.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

No word in our language—not even "Socialism"—has been employed more loosely than "Mysticism."

DEAN INGE.

The religious feeling is a fact which psychology simply analyses and follows in its transformations, but it is incompetent in the matter of its objective value.

RIBOT.

SYNOPSIS

The appeal of Mysticism—Its historical function—The present-day revival of interest in Mysticism : the influence of the new religious psychology and the study of comparative religion—The need for a valid intellectual appreciation of Mysticism. I. A fundamental misunderstanding : failure to distinguish between the mystical experience and its form and background—This confusion strengthened by the new psychological interpretation of Mysticism—The psychological method to be supplemented by the historical—Its reducing and abstracting character—Dr. Rufus M. Jones on psychology—Psychology a science of origins, not of validity. II. The weakness of the psychological method illustrated from Leuba's *A Psychological Study of Religion*—Arbitrary distinction between metaphysical and empirical theology—Psychology discredited by attempts to usurp function of metaphysics—The criteria of religious experience outside the realm of psychology—Miss Underhill's application of the psychological method to Jesus and St. Paul. III. Difficulty of defining Mysticism — Contradictory definitions — Questions to be answered in subsequent chapters.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

BENEATH the currents which by action and reaction have gone to shape Christian thought there sounds, like the fabled sunken bell, the strain of Mysticism. Thrust down by victorious institutional, rational and moralistic forces, the mystic note floats up from the depths—now muffled, now clear. Every now and again the penalty of success overtakes the ruling system, and Christian men, disillusioned of a hollow civilisation and an externalised Church, listen to the submerged melody and find it a song of deliverance; and out of such moments of reaction are born the great spiritual movements, whether explicitly mystical or only showing deep affinities with Mysticism. Thus out of the protest against a young Church already secularised and hardened into inflexibility there came Montanism with its wild prophetic passion, to die and to reappear again and again in divers forms throughout the course of Church history. Thus in a time of unparalleled spiritual and moral bankruptcy, when the corruptions of the Church, the "Babylonish Captivity," the great Civil War and the Black Death conspired to wean the soul from the intoxicating rhythm of external cults and affairs and attune it to the murmur of eternity upon the horizon, that most elastic and elusive of mystical groups, the

Friends of God, came into existence. Again, when the new-born Reformation theology tended to exhaust itself in the correction of abuses and a negative polemic against Rome and met men in revolt against the external authority of a Church with the no less external authority of a book and a creed, the so-called "spiritual reformers" bequeathed to a Church which despised and persecuted them not only "a religion of inward life and power," but also the foundations of a new theology.

And to-day once more a silence of disillusionment and misgiving has fallen upon the human spirit, and in the most unlikely quarters men are wondering if there be not some unguessed balm of healing, some transcendent word of liberation, in the dim and unfamiliar depth of mystical religion. Once more the spectacle of a tragically successful materialistic civilisation dying in blood and fire is shattering the delusions of a shallow and complacent optimism and driving us back upon the deeps of the soul where God speaks His creative and redeeming Word. And while this return upon the inwardness of things is not general in the sense of being a popular movement, it is so widely spread and so often found in places which seemed given over to the most naked materialism that it may be argued with conviction that we are on the verge of a true revival of mystical religion. What precise form this revival will take it is not easy to conjecture. As far as one can see, it is not likely to conform to any clear-cut type—at any rate, in its initial developments. It will follow not the mechanism of the "mystic way," but the spirit, which,

bound to no one *schema*, links the severe and cultivated insight of a St. John of the Cross to the homely vision of Miss Anna Bunston's Wiltshire peasant who communes with God under his apple tree. That the new interest in Mysticism has thrown the door wide for the charlatan and the pseudo-adept, and has fostered a craze for the "supernatural" in which a cold Athenian curiosity and a blind pathetic credulity are strangely mingled, need not cause us to look askance at the present renascence of mystical feeling. Such amateur cults are the inevitable excrescences of a deep and genuine movement towards spiritual reality.

Of positive elements which have contributed to a revived interest in Mysticism two must be mentioned —the new religious psychology and the study of comparative religion. The first brought unexpected support to a theology based upon the reality, autonomy, and self-evident character of the religious experience; the second, while superficially tending towards a false tolerance, has really gone to demonstrate the uniqueness of Christianity. In impressing it upon us that the aim and vital impulse of all religions is communion with the Unseen and the Eternal, the study of comparative religion serves to throw those elements in Christianity which make it *the* religion of ethical and spiritual communion with God into sharp relief against the many muddy and sterile factors that stultify the influence of the great ethnic religions.

But while a present-day revival of interest in Mysticism must be accepted as a fact, it remains to

ask how much of it is merely the unconsidered sympathy of minds touched with a vague mystic feeling and ready to accept as genuine Mysticism anything that ministers to their mood, often mistaking an instinct for spiritual beauty for a vision of spiritual reality, and how much is based upon a valid appreciation of Mysticism. The intellectual element needs special emphasis here, for while it is quite obvious that the humblest and most untutored soul with a genius for spiritual reality may be a mystic of the loftiest type without any explicitly intellectual conception of the nature of Mysticism, it is equally clear that a juster intellectual appreciation of what is really involved in Mysticism may result in a curious metamorphosis of opinion. In some cases it would convert the uninformed enthusiast into a cold critic; in others it would transform the prejudiced decrier into a sympathetic inquirer. No subject is more impenetrably hedged about with difficulties, ambiguities and misunderstandings, and any treatment of Mysticism which is to be of genuine service must begin with an attempt to resolve some of the main difficulties which beset the average student.

I

To begin with a fundamental source of misunderstanding. Mysticism stands primarily for a religious experience, but it also, at any rate in its historical form and development, involves certain philosophical and theological presuppositions: it has, in fact, a history and a background. The inevitable result is

that many who live by the mystical experience, but who are repelled by the philosophy and theology underlying the classical forms of Mysticism, frankly declare themselves averse to it; while others who neither possess, nor would very much care to possess, a genuine mystical experience are attracted by its philosophical and theological background and like to be accounted mystics. A case in point here is that of the person who revolts from the historicity and moralism of a narrow evangelical theology and desires an expression of the Divine activity in cosmic terms. His natural bent of mind is towards ideas rather than towards "facts," and he will therefore find a most satisfying system of thought in many types of Mysticism. He may have but the slightest sympathy with its devotional aspect, and may even be repelled by the passionately personal element in the true mystic's approach to God. But he finds Mysticism identified with the view of God and the world which corresponds most closely with his own intellectual affinities, and so he has no hesitation in confessing himself the disciple of masters whose inmost mind and spiritual practice he would be the first to repudiate.

This initial misunderstanding is greatly strengthened by the new psychological method of treating Mysticism which has found its most able and attractive English exponent in Miss Evelyn Underhill. Such a method proceeds upon the fundamental unity of all mystical experience, Christian or pagan, Eastern or Western, and ignores altogether the historical settings of the various periods and great figures of

Mysticism. It introduces us to the movements of the timeless mystic soul; it takes no cognisance of the raw material of contemporary ideas, hereditary prepossessions, and ecclesiastical influences upon which that soul worked and which reacted upon it. It therefore tends to obliterate the distinction between the temporal and accidental and the permanent and essential elements in Mysticism, reducing everything to the same level of timelessness. Of the value of this method, which marks a most important advance in our understanding of Mysticism, it is not necessary to speak at this late day. All its defects are inherent to specialised treatments of any subject, and specialised treatment is fast becoming the only possible method of doing justice to the increasing complexity and vastness of every field of knowledge. To-day Mysticism is seen to be a subject of far wider reference and greater complexity than was dreamt of by its earlier interpreters, and to attempt a general treatment combining the historical, theological, and psychological methods within the limits of one volume would be to court failure. But while specialised interpretations are a necessity, it is to be regretted that writers who take the exclusively psychological view are not always careful to point out that their interpretation needs to be supplemented by the historical method, with the result that the beginner is confronted with needless difficulties and discrepancies. Allowing to the utmost for the deep principle of timeless unity which links the mystics of all climes and ages together, it still remains that a great deal, not only of mystic thought,

but also of the form of mystical experience, is determined or coloured by the religious and intellectual conceptions of its day. It follows that an interpretation like the psychological, which is, of necessity, from the historical point of view, an exposition *in vacuo*, must result in investing its subject with an air of unreality. As a matter of fact, however richly it is illustrated from the lives and sayings of the mystics, and however detailed and accurate its analysis of concrete cases, it can, in the last resort, only introduce us to that indispensable but none the less misleading abstraction "the mystic," just as such books as Professor James' *Varieties of Religious Experience*, in spite of their wealth in genuine human documents, leave us in the end with a useful diagram or skeleton, "the religious temperament," but utterly and necessarily fail to bring us into touch with the religious life. It cannot introduce us to Mysticism in living interaction with the general stream of human life; and it must be remembered that such interaction took place even where the individual mystic was a recluse out of all physical contact with his age.

Moreover, the mystic, viewed as a psychological abstraction, is not a unity, for psychology can give us nothing more than a succession of psychological states; it cannot give the Divine activity initiating, sustaining, and unifying the human. As Dr. Rufus Jones reminds us,[1] psychology is as empirical as any other science and possesses no ladder by which it can transcend the empirical order. It does not, and

[1] *Spiritual Reformers in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, Introduction, pp. xvi—xix.

in its very nature cannot, do more than describe certain reactions which take place in the soul in response to stimuli which may, or may not, have objective value. But that which gives its meaning to religious experience is precisely that transcendent and objective element concerning which psychology has nothing to say. It is when God says, "Seek ye My face," that the soul replies, "Thy face, Lord, will I seek." Psychology merely presents to us the soul in the act of seeking; it can tell us nothing about the object of her search, nor even whether there is an "object" outside of her own self-induced activity. And when psychologists here and there make the categorical assertion that religious experience is nothing more than the subjective activity of the soul revolving round its own axis, they are venturing upon a judgment which, as psychologists, they have no right to make. Psychology is a science of origins, not of validity; and to claim for it the power of deciding upon the validity or truth of ideas is, in the end, to discredit it.

II

A characteristic instance of this vicious use of psychology, all the more significant as coming from one who is confessedly the reverse of a materialist, is seen in Professor Leuba's treatment of the relation between theology and psychology.[1] Professor Leuba starts from the assumption that "the gods of religion are inductions from experience."[2] He then pro-

[1] *A Psychological Study of Religion*, Chap. XI., especially pp. 244—261.
[2] *Ibid.*, Preface, p. viii.

ceeds to make an arbitrary distinction between metaphysical and empirical theology. The former he rejects, in a somewhat Ritschlian fashion, as giving us a God-idea which has nothing to do with religion.[1] The latter resolves itself, in his view, into a mere matter of psychological analysis. Theologians have made a hopeless muddle of the problem: the only person who can grapple with it is the scientific psychologist, of whom theologians have so craven and superstitious a fear.

Now when Dr. Leuba starts from the position that the gods of religion are inductions from experience, one need not quarrel with that thesis, provided it be understood to mean that the induction is made *by the experient*, and not by the analytic psychologist who coolly anatomises the experience in the sterile atmosphere of his laboratory. It is one thing for the believer to say, "I know that God exists, because I have felt Him working in me to comfort, strengthen and inspire. I know Christ saves, for I called upon Him in the hour of temptation and was made strong to tread sin beneath my feet." It is quite another thing to claim that the validity or otherwise of such a conclusion can be established by psychological analysis. The soul that has had a deep, inward experience of God may utter its conviction

[1] Dr. Leuba's criticism of the Ritschlian position is characteristic. He describes the "empirical apologetics" which is the outcome of Ritschlianism as resting upon "two mutually exclusive propositions. On the one hand, it would protect religion against metaphysics by setting up inner experiences as . . . the only source of religious knowledge. On the other hand, it would defend religion against science by invoking the principle of transcendence according to which science is incompetent to deal with religious knowledge and in particular with the question of God" (*A Psychological Study of Religion*, p. 244).

with a spiritual authority unchallenged within its own sphere. The psychologist can only make a partial pronouncement upon such experience.

While one may frankly agree with Dr. Leuba that theology has failed to acknowledge and utilise the indispensable work of the scientific psychologist, that work, valuable as it is, is strictly limited in scope. His claim to make religious experience the subject of analysis is fully justified, but not the claim that his analysis is exhaustive: he must be content to work hand in hand with the metaphysician, the theologian, and the historian. He cannot usurp their functions without bringing his science into disrepute. After all, we cannot speak of religious experience without asking not only, Of what? but, Of *Whom*? And the validity of such experience is found in its relationship to and action upon the whole coherent system of our experience, which involves metaphysical, theological, historical, and other problems outside the scope of psychological analysis. The question is whether a given religious experience unifies our world, is in harmony with universal principles, solves problems which no other power could solve, and is effective in something more than the crude, pragmatic sense. Psychology can, at its best, only give us one half of a movement in which it is precisely the remaining half which justifies the whole. This is obvious; yet such is the glamour which the very term "religious psychology" has for certain minds, that a book like Professor James' *Varieties of Religious Experience* is hailed as the final justification of religious experience against all assaults, and the complete solution of all

mysteries involved in the soul's contact with the Eternal. How far astray an exclusively psychological method may lead a most gifted exponent is seen in Miss Underhill's *The Mystic Way*, where she attempts the *tour de force* of fitting the experience of Jesus and of Paul into the conventional three-stage mould of classical Mysticism, with the result of sacrificing all sanity of historical interpretation without gaining even a consistent psychology.

It follows, therefore, from all this, that a really adequate study of Mysticism must include researches in fields not immediately related to the mystical experience. It certainly involves, in the case of the study of Christian mystics, a knowledge of Church history, and especially of the great theological struggles; also, of course, a knowledge of the history of philosophy and more especially of that movement which may roughly be called Platonism, as it influenced the thought of speculative mystics in succeeding ages and, indeed, may still be said to influence it. One half of what seems bizarre, irrational or irrelevant to the average reader of mystical literature will become luminous and significant when viewed in relation to the particular intellectual or religious conflict out of which it was born, and the tendency against which it was designed to react.

A subsidiary difficulty which meets the student on the very threshold arises out of the inevitable limitations and idiosyncrasies of mystical literature. His introduction to the original sources is rendered difficult by the peculiar language of the great mystics —a language which has no parallel in the religious

phraseology of to-day. And when he turns from the original sources to the interpreters of Mysticism, he finds that our best writers are entirely steeped in the language of the great mystics. This is natural enough, but we need not conceal from ourselves that the very thing which seems most real and congenial to the writer impresses the reader who is not familiarised with mystical phraseology as unreal, if not deliberately affected. The discerning reader will not for a moment deny that the language and presentation of such interpreters—one can only once more instance Miss Underhill—are touched with beauty of an arresting and keenly poignant type, and have their own spiritual distinction and charm. But their beauty is of a weirdly unfamiliar character, and as the reader gropes his way through phrases consecrated by age-long mystic uses, but to him dim as faded tapestry and remote as an old-world fable, he misses all sense of continuity with his own life and experience. There is nothing more curiously powerful than the influence of phraseology upon the mind, and in eight cases out of ten a proposition which would be convincing if couched in the language of the reader's intellectual *habitat* becomes "sicklied o'er with the pale cast" of artificiality and quasi-esotericism when presented in a foreign tongue.

III

To arrive at a satisfactory working definition of Mysticism is not easy, and an acquaintance with existing definitions will increase, rather than lessen,

the difficulty. One need only glance over the well-known definitions of theologians, philosophers and poets[1] to realise the complexity and multiplicity of a subject that can produce such a variety of conflicting impressions upon trained minds. We find Noack laying it down that Mysticism is "formless speculation," while Coventry Patmore insists that it is the most concrete and definite kind of spiritual apprehension of which man is capable. Goethe leaves us groping in the twilight after he has told us that Mysticism is the scholastic of the heart, the dialectic of the feelings; Lasson, on the other hand, accuses it of overvaluing knowledge and reason. Cardinal Wiseman extols it as the science of love; Harnack stigmatises it as rationalism applied to the sphere above reason. Ewald holds mystical theology to be in consonance with simple evangelical faith; the theosophical mystic defines his object as initiation into the Gnosis, the wisdom of Divine mysteries. Ultramontane writers agree in defining Mysticism as the experience of miraculous, or at least supernatural, phenomena; and Protestant writers deny that such phenomena are essential, or indeed anything but harmful, to the mystic quest. A large but steadily decreasing number of interpreters charge the mystics with laziness, selfishness, and indifference to human woe; an increasing number, on the contrary, agree with Ewald that "the true mystic never withdraws himself from the business of life—no, not even from the smallest business."

[1] For an extensive and interesting list of definitions, see Inge, *Christian Mysticism*, Appendix A.

A group of theologians, including Principal Forsyth and Professor Oman in England, and Professors Herrmann and Schlatter in Germany, follow the Ritschlian school in contending that Mysticism, so far from being the movement of the Christian soul at its highest power, is essentially alien to Christianity and must be combated as a weakening and vitiating influence. They are sharply opposed by another group, including Dean Inge, Dr. Gwatkin, the late Canon Moberly, and many young and rising men, who see in Mysticism the central and essential element in Christianity to which theological thought must return. To take one more instance. There are those who agree with Harnack that Mysticism is essentially Catholic, and a Protestant mystic a logical absurdity; while others assert with Dr. Gwatkin that the basal principle of Mysticism is specifically Protestant.

Such glaring discrepancies of definition cannot be accounted for by relegating them entirely to the idiosyncrasies of the various interpreters. It is obvious that a person of explicitly practical bent will be inclined to accuse the mystics of idle dreaming, and a scholar of severely intellectual type will charge them with hypertrophy of sentiment; but this does not account for the amazing contradictoriness of existing definitions, many of which are determined by no such temperamental bias. A more generally valid explanation is found in the characteristic ambiguity of many of the great mystic writers who used loosely terms which the modern scribe uses with more or less scientific exactitude, and who,

where they possessed scholarly training, employed the language of a philosophy and a psychology unfamiliar to many otherwise well-informed interpreters. But the main explanation lies elsewhere. The contradictions and antinomies that irritate us as we study the existing definitions are, with certain exceptions, not due to the temperamental or intellectual bias of the interpreter, nor are they to be accounted for by verbal misunderstandings: they are inherent in Mysticism itself. A movement of the soul which unites in itself the timeless and the progressive, the static and the dynamic, passivity and activity, absorption and independence, surrender and acquisition, must hold within itself the most baffling oppositions, the most obstinate antinomies. Paradox, passion, "offence"—these are the three "notes" of Christianity which are most clearly impressed upon the mystic heart. The contradictions of those who essay to define Mysticism are but echoes of more vital contradictions in the thing defined—contradictions which are not, indeed, outside logic, but which demand a larger logic than mere ratiocination to resolve them.

Even if we lay this conflicting jumble of opinion aside and adopt as our starting point the rough statement that Mysticism is a direct inward apprehension of the Divine, we do not escape the pressure of inherent antinomies. Immediately certain questions present themselves. Is a special sense or spiritual instinct necessary for such apprehension, or is it achieved by means of the normal powers or faculties of the soul raised to their highest potency?

Is this development of the spiritual powers open to all, or confined to an esoteric circle? What relation does mystic apprehension bear to the psychic phenomena of Mysticism? What is the place of the contemplative and the active elements in the mystic life? What is the relation of the mystic to the world of nature, of thought, and of social relationships? To these questions and to others arising therefrom the succeeding chapters will attempt an answer, keeping in view throughout the meaning and value of Mysticism for the present day.

CHAPTER II

THE NATURE OF MYSTIC APPREHENSION

Within man is the soul of the Holy, the wise silence, the universal Beauty the Eternal One.

EMERSON.

The most dangerous and lasting of all the aberrations of Mysticism aros from yielding to the inordinate desire to establish the fact of some conscious activity *other* than Reason imparted by God to the elect only.

RÉCÉJAC.

SYNOPSIS

Is there a special mystic sense or organ ?—Is mystical apprehension open to all or the peculiar property of an esoteric circle ? I. A special mystic sense asserted by few modern writers—The influence of Gnosticism and Manichæan dualism —Mediæval *μισολογία*: Hugh of St. Victor—Miss Underhill on the mystic faculty—Is it something other than reason, will and emotion ?—Is it to be sought in the sub-conscious ?—Critique of Miss Underhill's position—Mystic apprehension not a special organ, but reason, will and emotion turned upon their source and goal—The place of passivity in mystic apprehension—Jacob Boehme on true mystic " silence "—Mysticism not the whole of religion—A " pure " mystic is a monstrosity—Coventry Patmore on spiritual apprehension—Valid and degraded forms of Mysticism. II. The problem of esotericism : are there two " ways " to God ?—The initiate *versus* the exoteric disciple—Esotericism and universality of appeal in mystical literature—The mystic and the common people : Tauler, Hilton, Law—A vicious view of esotericism—The esoteric principle inherent in life itself, but misused by quasi-mystical cults—The true initiate—The elect not a segregated caste of adepts, but pioneers—Coventry Patmore's portrait of a saint.

CHAPTER II

THE NATURE OF MYSTIC APPREHENSION

The question as to whether there is a special mystic sense or organ, and whether this faculty is—in its rudimentary form at least—common to all or the peculiar mark of an esoteric fraternity, has exercised mystical writers of all races and ages. Speaking roughly, the philosophical mystics, who derived their metaphysics from Neoplatonism and their theology from the Greek Fathers, held that in every soul there is a core of that God-likeness which alone can comprehend God, and that spiritual apprehension is therefore the most truly "natural" activity of the soul. The devotional and practical mystics, on the other hand (but this phrase must not be taken to imply that the philosophical mystics lacked devotion and spiritual passion), being influenced partly by the old Gnostic leaven, partly by the Roman doctrine of a salvation and grace imparted from without, tended to conceive of a special organ of apprehension other than the will, the emotions and the reason, and imparted or withheld as the occult justice of God decreed. In an age when philosophy had fallen into disrepute among the religious and psychology in the modern sense was yet unborn, the doctrine of a special mystical faculty was readily accepted by many practical mystics as affording a plausible solution of

such problems as the apparent inability of the mass of mankind to assimilate mystical teaching, and the seeming violence done to the human reason in mystical experience.

I

Few modern writers are bold enough to argue for the existence of a separate mystic sense, different in kind from those faculties of the soul which the mystic shares with the rest of humanity. Such a proposition is rejected by most writers as a mediæval survival which cannot for a moment bear the test of either psychology or metaphysics. It takes us back to Gnosticism at its worst, to a division of men into three classes—mere animals, initiates of the secret wisdom, and that unfortunate middle class which can neither attain to adeptship nor wallow contentedly in the slough of material things. It marks a retrogression to that Manichæan dualism which has haunted Christian thought from age to age, and is the peculiar snare of those who approach Mysticism without an adequate study of the influences that helped to give it its traditional forms. Such students are constantly betrayed into an attempt to graft unrecognised Gnostic and Manichæan elements on to their own essentially modern monistic view of the universe, with the result of presenting a piebald interpretation shot through with an element of pseudo-occultism which puts sensible persons on their guard. Mystics who assume a special mystic sense almost invariably oppose it to *reason*, which is understood by them not merely in the narrow sense of the dis-

cursive understanding, but as including the whole intellectual and perceptive side of life. Thus Hugh of St. Victor tells us that when the soul is immersed in contemplation of the Absolute " the Reason of the soul sleeps, because, ignorant of the cause of such happiness, it is not capable of conceiving its origin, its present reality, and its purpose." [1] But this implies, *per contra*, that when reason wakes again, it either flatly denies the reality of the soul's mystic vision, or else is completely unaware of it. In either case a dualism has been introduced which would make mystic apprehension an *alienation* in the pathological sense of that word.

A most interesting discussion of the nature of mystic apprehension is contributed by Miss Underhill.[2] Her position is not altogether clear, and her statement self-contradictory in places; but as an attempt to re-state the old doctrine of a special mystic sense in terms of modern psychology it is of considerable significance. Miss Underhill clearly postulates a special mystical faculty, which she proceeds to relate to the ordinary or " normal " faculties of the soul. In her view, the special mystic sense " differs from and transcends the emotional, intellectual and volitional life of ordinary men " [3]; but this must not be taken to imply that it is opposed to or separated from that life. On the contrary, it " has attachments at each point to the emotion, the intellect and the will " and " can express itself

[1] *De Contemplatione et ejus Speciebus* [TRANS. Haureau], p. 140.
[2] *Mysticism*, pp. 58-69.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 59.

under each of the aspects which these terms connote." [1]

The intention here is clearly to escape from the impossible irrationalism and dualism of mediæval Mysticism, but the choice of such an expression as "attachments," with its suggestion of an external addition to the ordinary faculties, and a using of them as a man uses tools, is unfortunate. It belongs to the conception of things which in the realm of religion has made Divine grace and inspiration to consist in the introduction from the "outside" of a power fundamentally different from the soul that receives it. To preach such a doctrine from the pulpit to-day would be a reversion to a superseded view of God and the world. Why, then, introduce terms sufficiently ambiguous to suggest such a view into a discussion of Mysticism? If mystic apprehension is anything but a pathological symptom, it must conform to the criterion of identity which we apply to all "supernatural" facts. It must be continuous with the emotion, the intellect and the will, not "attaching" itself to them and, as it were, expressing itself through them, as the Dæmon was supposed to express himself through the tranced prophet, but augmenting them from within, "adding the same to the same." It is not for a moment suggested that Miss Underhill intends anything so external as this, but her use of the term "attachment" and her quotation in this connection from Plotinus—"Another intellect, different from that which reasons and is denominated rational"—imply an opposition rather than a vital

[1] *Mysticism*, p. 59.

connection between the mystic sense and reason. In a passage which seems to represent her final position she contends that "since normal man, by means of his feeling, thought and will, is utterly unable to set up relations with spiritual Reality, it is clearly in the depth of being—in these unplumbed levels of personality—that we must search if we would find the organ, the power, by which he is to achieve the mystic quest. That alteration of consciousness which takes place in contemplation can only mean the emergence from this fund or bottom of the soul of some faculty which diurnal life keeps hidden in the deeps." [1] In what follows she admits that that power or organ is present in its rudimentary form, and more or less deeply hidden, with all men, but that in the mystics, those "natural explorers of the Infinite," the silent, hidden "Dweller in the Innermost" becomes active and articulate. There is a "putting to sleep of that normal self which usually wakes and the awakening of that 'Transcendent Self' which usually sleeps." [2] It is, in fact, "a re-making of the whole personality in the interests of one bit or spot of man which belongs not to Time but to Eternity." [3]

All this does not tell us anything very definite about the precise nature of that special mystic sense which is to be found hidden in the depths of the personality—the sense which Miss Underhill seems to identify at times with the whole spiritual self, the hidden man of the heart. On two points she is quite

[1] *Mysticism*, p. 61.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 67.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 63.

clear. The hidden faculty must not be identified with that very mixed and muddy quantity, the subconscious; and its action upon will, feeling and intellect is positive, enhancing and not paralysing their activity. The mystics, she says, "have roused the Dweller in the Innermost from its slumbers and round it have unified their life. Heart, reason, will are there in full action, drawing their energy, not from the shadow-show of sense, but from the deeps of true Being; where a lamp is lit and a consciousness awake of which the sleepy crowd remains oblivious." [1] Here she stands in wholesome contradiction to the negative conception of the mystic faculty as held by the Victorines, St. Bonaventura, St. John of the Cross, St. Teresa and many others, who think of its action as a process of emptying and stripping bare and silencing and putting to sleep the normal powers of the soul.

It would, indeed, appear from the tenor of Miss Underhill's language that what she means by a special mystical sense is really man's susceptibility for God. But in that case her choice of language is particularly unfortunate, for the soul's susceptibility for God cannot be legitimately symbolised by such spatial figures as "a bit or spot of man." Nor can it be described as an occult faculty which moves and inspires heart, reason, and will. It is in reality nothing else than the intellectual, volitional and emotional powers turned upon their source and goal. So far from the "normal" man being "utterly unable to set up relations with spiritual

[1] *Mysticism*, p. 75.

reality by means of his feeling, thought and will," these three are the organs by which man is *intended* to make contact with God; and wherever they correspond merely to the "natural" world, we have a condition which, so far from being normal, is, in the deepest sense, abnormal. It is at this point that a return to the root-principles which gave to early Greek theology its enlarging and energising power will save Mysticism from an essentially narrowing dualistic conception. The early Greek Fathers taught that man's susceptibility for God is *not* something other than "normal," but that it is the natural craving of a spirit constituted for God and inalienably affiliated with the Divine. It is not something moving the reason, directing the will, setting the emotions on fire: it is reason, will and feeling exercising their most truly natural function—the whole personality of man in contact with its Source and End. We are accustomed to say, in common religious parlance, that man has a deep hunger for God, and the phrase suggests a special capacity which cries out to find its fulfilment in God. But what do we really mean by it? Is it not that man's heart cries for a home in the heart of God, that man's mind aches for the light of the Eternal Reason, that man's will gropes for anchorage in the Divine will? One or other of the three faculties may be primary in the movement towards God, according to the individual temperament, or all three may have an equal share in it. But whichever be predominant, man's hunger for God cannot, without violating all good sense, be described as a special spiritual organ or

capacity. In the case of the mystic that susceptibility for God which is latent and neglected in the average soul reaches its full development and becomes real apprehension—a vital perception of Reality more clear and convincing than the testimony of the senses. As Miss Underhill rightly says, " Just as genius in any of the arts is, humanly speaking, the final term of a power of which each individual possesses the rudiments, so Mysticism may be looked upon as the final term, the active expression of a power latent in the whole race." [1]

But here it may be objected that a conception of the mystic faculty which identifies it with emotion, intellect and will raised to their highest potency and exercising their most truly " natural " function contradicts not only the theory, but the experience of all the great master-mystics, who invariably found that the Eternal can only be experienced in a profound and brooding silence extending even to thought and desire. Nothing, indeed, is more common in mystical experience than the vision and transfiguration that come to the soul within the dark "cloud of unknowing," the mysterious spiritual potency and fertility which are the outcome of deep, interior quiet. How then can we say that mystic apprehension is reason and feeling and will in supreme action ? A passage from Jacob Boehme on true quiet of soul suggests the answer to such a question : " Cease but from thine own activity, steadfastly fixing thine eye upon one point. For this end, gather in all thy thoughts and by faith press into the Centre,

[1] *Mysticism*, p. 87.

laying hold upon the Word of God, which is infallible and which hath called thee. Be thou obedient to this call, and be silent before the Lord sitting alone with Him in thy inmost and most hidden cell, thy mind being centrally united in itself and attending His will in the patience of hope. So shall thy light break forth as the morning." [1] Here the two elements which make up true silence of the soul are clearly set forth. There is attention—the capacity for steady and sustained insight into reality—and there is the active co-operation of the obedient spirit. Boehme's "silence before the Lord" is not that sleep of the reason which Hugh of St. Victor extols, for the sleeping reason cannot "gather in all its thoughts." It is rather the wise "passiveness" of Wordsworth by which the soul is nourished. It is reason (by which is meant not the discursive understanding to which Boehme rightly denies spiritual vision, but "the whole logic of the personality") in that state of pure receptiveness and purged passivity which is in itself an act involving all the energies of the soul. Reasoning and speculation are indeed suspended, but only for the sake of those "good thoughts" which are "the free children of God and do not come by thinking." Such activity of the soul may be described as an "alienation," but not in the sense of a drugging or hypnotisation of the faculties: it is reason, will and emotion alienated from their preoccupation with the ephemeral, and naturalised to their high original uses.

It should be remembered here that it is quite

[1] *Dialogues of the Supersensual Life*, p. 56.

illegitimate to claim a monopoly of the spiritual instinct for Mysticism, as Miss Underhill appears to do. The mystical is only one element in religion, and while every true Christian is, to some extent, a mystic, the spiritual self comes to its own in temperaments whose main bent is not in the direction of Mysticism. Communion with God, spiritual inwardness, inspired insight into Reality, are not confined to mystics; nor must it be forgotten that the greatest mystics have owed their force and stability to the admixture of other elements, whether rational, evangelical or institutional, in their spiritual constitution. A "pure" mystic is, indeed, unthinkable outside the madhouse.

For a description of mystical apprehension which, however partial and defective, has the merit of being untechnical and modern in feeling we may turn to Coventry Patmore. His terminology differs somewhat widely from that of the present-day psychological interpreter of Mysticism, and he takes his start from that form and degree of real apprehension which is "emphatically the quality which constitutes good sense." "To see rightly is the first of human qualities; right feeling and right action are normally its consequence. There are two ways of seeing: one is to comprehend, which is to see all round a thing and to embrace it; one is to apprehend, which is to see it in part or to take hold of it. A thing may be really taken hold of which is much too big for embracing.[1] . . . You cannot read the writings of Newman, Hooker, Pascal and St. Augustine without

[1] *Religio Poetæ*, p. 282.

being strongly impressed with the presumption that they have a real apprehension of the things they profess to believe; and, since they do not justify in any other way the theory that they are lunatics, a right-minded reader is disposed to think that what they have thus seen exists, and that his not having seen such things need not materially diminish that probability.[1] . . . Genius is nothing but great good sense or real apprehension exercised upon objects more or less out of common sight, and the chief ingredient of even the highest and most heroic sanctity is the same apprehension taking hold upon spiritual truths and applying them to the conduct of the interior as well as the exterior life. . . .[2]

"The intellect is the faculty of the seer. It discerns truth as a living thing . . . without anything that can properly be called ratiocination. . . . Although this faculty of direct vision is very rare in comparison with those of ordinary ratiocination and memory, it is not nearly so rare as is supposed. . . . For one seer who has the accomplishments and opportunities whereby his faculty can be turned to public account, there are scores and hundreds who possess and exercise for their private use their extraordinary perceptive powers. To whom has it not happened, at one time or other, to witness the instantaneous shattering of some splendid edifice of reasoning and memory by the brief, Socratic interrogation of some ignoramus who could see?"[3]

[1] *Religio Poetæ*, p. 285.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 284.
[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 291-292.

Fragmentary and of purely suggestive value as this account is, it emphasises an important point—the continuity of spiritual with ordinary apprehension. The implication is not, of course, that every person of good sense could exercise mystical apprehension if only he felt so inclined, but that the mystical apprehension is the highest rung of a ladder which reaches from common sense to ecstasy

We are left, then, with a conception of mystical apprehension which makes it not "another sort of consciousness, another 'sense' beyond the normal qualities of the self"[1]; but man's native susceptibility for God as the controlling principle of his whole personality—that steeping of mind, heart and will in what is vital and eternal, which is not the mere beholding of a Divine Image, "with open face," but the being "transformed into that same Image from glory unto glory." It is the Seeing of which all other seeing is but a shadowy type; that eating of the Bread of Heaven of which all Eucharistic celebrations are only a pale copy. While realised fully and explicitly by comparatively few, it is, in some degree, the property of all truly spiritual beings; and the number of inarticulate mystics who have neither the gift of expressing their experience, nor the art of recognising it for what it is, is far larger than we imagine. Above all, it must be kept in mind that any so-called mystical experience which is the result of putting the reason to sleep, of self-hypnotisation, or of any deliberately cultivated psychic process, is a degraded form of Mysticism. However often such methods may have

[1] E. Underhill, *Mysticism*, p. 59.

been employed in good faith by mystics of the most valid insight and of the highest ethical character, they must, in themselves, be regarded as belonging to an occultism which has nothing in common with the high moral and spiritual energies of the soul that seeks the living God.

II

We have seen that the mystic faculty is not a special organ, but the development of what is rudimentary in all. The point before us now is whether this development is open to all, or whether the relation of mystics to non-mystics is that of esoteric initiation to exoteric discipleship. And here it must be borne in mind that an esoteric circle need not necessarily be a small one. We may grant quite readily that while the great master-mystics are few, the number of those who share the mystic gift without the power of expressing it, or even of recognising it in themselves, is far larger than we think, and yet we may hold that the circle is closed—that not all men are capable of reaching the point of development at which their instinctive sense of God passes into vital perception.

The question is one that has agitated Christian opinion in all ages. On the one hand, we have those who interpret the mystic "way" as a specialised form of the search for Reality to which only the "elect" are called; on the other, there are very many who oppose this doctrine as alien to the spirit of Christianity. For the Christian, they say, there is but one road to God, and the wayfaring man, though a fool, cannot err therein. Honesty, simplicity, spiritual receptivity, a humble and loving heart,

these are the only conditions of initiation into a way which is equally open to John the farm labourer and to John the Divine. Between these two views the inquirer stands perplexed. A healthy instinct makes him recoil from the idea of a special order of initiates, with its inevitable tendency to breed the most objectionable form of spiritual priggishness and to end in a debased occultism. But over against that he has intimate personal knowledge of men and women who actually live on loftier planes of spiritual insight and activity than their fellows—whose life, indeed, suggests a difference not merely in degree, but in kind ; and such facts are stubborn things to quarrel with. Moreover, the Bibles of all religions are standing witnesses to the fact that special intuitions of truth and grace are given to elect souls. Nay, every aspiring spirit has stood for brief but indelible moments upon the confines of a new world, has touched heights he was not competent to keep, has felt in one passing flash of direct intuition that all things were possible to him that believeth. Such meteoric illuminations have made him turn wistful eyes to the Mystic Way, only to be repelled once more by its sharply defined stages, its unfamiliar mechanism and its archaic trappings ; above all, by its hateful suggestion of esotericism.

When we turn to mystical literature the same opposition confronts us. We are made conscious both of a strict and intimate esotericism and of a broad and far-reaching appeal to what is most truly and deeply human in man. Its esotericism is not the provincial temper of the sect, the secret society, the coterie of

adepts ; it is the august secrecy of the Holy Assembly —that interior Church gathered together from every age and nation, in which a humble shoemaker may be the chief hierophant of mysteries and the little child take place among the doctors. Hence we are not surprised to find that the most influential parts of mystical literature are not those which have gone to produce sects and societies, but rather those which speak most plainly to the universal human heart. Such literature does not busy itself with the shibboleths of any "school" of mystical doctrine, but opens up that *philosophia perennis* which is the only theosophy that is not at the mercy of changing intellectual fashions and is approved by the pure and aspiring heart everywhere.

While the vision of the mystics is "so interwoven into the very fibre of his inmost being that it refuses to be detached and offered to others as material for mental assimilation," [1] God ever comes to the true mystic seer, not merely as He who has called him by name, but as "the light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world." Knowing God as the hidden ground of his own being, he also knows Him as the hidden ground of every man's being ; and so, while he must ever say, "My secret unto myself," he is also pledged to an apostolate among men. For him there can be no *profanum vulgus*—such paganism is entirely abhorrent to the mystic genius. For him there is no such thing as an "exoteric" crowd. At all times and in all places he is conscious of addressing himself to the

[1] W. F. Cobb, *Mysticism and the Creed*, p. 37.

Divine witness in the heart, to the unknown Christ in man. While, therefore, duly on his guard against the casting of pearls before swine, no timid scruples lest he profane the mysteries will keep him aloof from the common people, nor will a vicious dignity blind him to his kinship with his fellows. Among Christian mystics, at any rate, we find little affectation of esotericism such as the uninformed critic often assumes, but, on the contrary, a simple-hearted willingness to impart of their treasure to all who ask in sincerity, and, not infrequently, the passion of the preacher or prophet. Thus Tauler preached Mysticism to crowded congregations of average church-goers—to those who "made shoes by the Holy Spirit" as well as to those who wrote books. Walter Hilton, that most humble and sweet-spoken of English mystics, wrote for such as had not even a working acquaintance with every-day religious language. In the writings of William Law it is the simple *Rusticus*, innocent even of the art of reading, who loves Jacob Boehme and apprehends mysteries which are the despair of the learned *Academicus*. Ruysbroeck, most daringly speculative and esoteric of Catholic mystics, was also one of the most easily accessible of teachers, ever ready to open up the way to the most ignorant and unpromising of inquirers. And the instinct which prompts the mystic to stand before a group or a crowd and make appeal, not to the crowd-spirit, but to Him who ever goes in advance of His messengers and who speaks in the heart of the hearers before He speaks in the voice of the preacher, has been amply justified by results.

In the most unlikely quarters souls have responded to the mystic witness. There is no "church" so universal, so representative, as the innumerable company of unknown mystics throughout the world. Not only the restless and unconventional, the wild adventurers in search of the *Mysterium Magnum*, answer to the mystic message; in every humble work-a-day Christian congregation there are those who live by mystic apprehension. The discerning traveller marvels again and again at the large number of poor unlettered folk, often in remote country-sides, who have deep kinship with the great mystics, and, by an infallible instinct, understand what they have never been taught in so many words, holding in toil-worn hands the key to realms of spiritual truth whose gates are barred to the deliberate frequenter of mystic societies. "I have heard," says Coventry Patmore, "some of our 'savages,' haunters of little 'Bethels,' 'Sions' and 'Carmels,' use the obscurest imagery of Scripture with an evident grasp of its significance which many a Bishop might have envied."[1] The fact is that our conception of the mystic life is determined by an entirely false and mischievous convention. We have become obsessed by a doctrine of mystic esotericism which the great mystics would have repudiated in wrath. Everything they have written concerning the severe secrecy of the mystic quest has been externalised by us, until we have imported into our study of Mysticism the atmosphere of the shilling *séance*, the "New Thought" centre, and the average Masonic lodge.

[1] *Religio Poetæ*, p. 236.

Such conventional esotericism should be called by its true name, which is not Mysticism, but Occultism.

But all this does not dispose of the main issue. Are there really two ways to God? And is there a body of Christian "initiates" who possess a secret withheld from the generality of believers? We answer both No and Yes. If the term "a body of initiates" implies that God fails to satisfy the humble soul that approaches Him in faith because it does not possess a certain genius for the Absolute, the answer is unequivocally No. It is told of Sœur Thérèse, of Liseux, that when as a small child she was abnormally exercised on the subject of different degrees of illumination and grace her big sister bade her bring a tumbler and a thimble and fill both with water, and then pointed out to her that while the tumbler held much more than the thimble, yet both were full to the limit of their capacity. And from that time she never doubted that God not only has mercy on the longing soul, but that He satisfieth it and filleth the hungry soul with goodness. There is in this sense no favoured class of initiates upon whom the less gifted need look in envy. Fulness of life is promised, not to the illuminated, but to those who hunger and thirst after righteousness. Yet there is a profound difference between, say, the spiritual life of St. Paul and that of the average well-meaning Christian soul. Wherein does that difference consist, and can it be said that Paul was master of a special and more immediate "way" to God?

A very simple illustration may serve to set us on the right track. In every rightly-ordered home

there is an equally open and direct way for every child to the father's heart, and very often the child that is weakest physically and mentally is the surest to find it. But take the case of two equally healthy and well-developed children. The one, genuinely dutiful and affectionate, but somewhat unimaginative and easy-going, takes his father's affection for granted, and makes no conscious effort to get into sympathy with that father's mind. The other makes himself his father's companion and almost instinctively anticipates his wishes. That child may be said to have found a way to his father which the other does not dream of. And when the ground of this perfect sympathy of one son with a father who loves both equally is investigated, it will be found that while painstaking love is one essential element in it, and an impelling desire to enter into his father's mind and life another, yet they cannot completely account for the difference. Deepest of all, there is something that defies analysis—an instinctive sympathy, an inborn divination, a genius for filial affection; something which the other boy could not wholly attain, took he ever so much pains. And in admitting this we have granted the esoteric principle, not, indeed, as defined by quasi-mystical secret societies, but as inherent in life itself.

And simple as this is, it covers the whole case, as far as we can cover it. Here is a trusty, unimaginative, well-intentioned Christian man, doing his duty in life and sending many an honest prayer heavenwards as he goes along. Who would deny that such an one has found a plain and sunlit road to the

Father's heart? But here is another man—an unlettered and obscure toiler, maybe—who finds deep in his heart the instinct for communion with the Eternal, and, having found this treasure, for the joy of it goes and sells all that he has, that he may own the field of his soul. Such a man will so regulate his life as to make room for deep brooding and long silent vigils before the lamp of the hidden sanctuary. This is bound to involve a greater or lesser measure of weariness, self-denial, ridicule, and loss of popularity and money. Such a man may never have heard of the stages of the Mystic Way, but the less acquaintance he has with mystical jargon the deeper his hidden life is likely to be. He may never do any outstanding work in the world, but he will wear that indefinable hall-mark of spiritual aristocracy which never fails to be recognised by those who live at the king's court. He will impress men with a strange integrity and self-identity of soul. He will manifest the supreme simplicity and honesty that can come only of an unsparing self-abandonment to God. He may possibly incur a charge of being remiss in "good works" and spending too much time in brooding meditation, yet no candid soul will doubt that he is one of the world's benefactors. We ask, Why the difference between him and his good-hearted but obtuse brother in Christ? Why is not the in-seeing eye given to all God's children? There is only the answer which is and is not an answer: "My sheep hear My voice"; "All men have not faith." We have arrived at a gateless barrier. There is this star in the darkness, however: the mysterious gift of mystic

apprehension is bestowed upon elect souls not for their own glory, but for our sakes and for the sake of the whole Church of God. They are not a segregated caste of adepts; they are pioneers, beating plain with bleeding feet the road we all in our measure are called to tread. Their triumphs are ours, their brimming cup of life is drawn from the same deep well into which the dullest and most imperfect may freely dip their buckets. The true mystic never glories in that the very devils are subject to him, but rather in that his name, in common with that of all God's children, is written in the Book of Life. With us they rejoice in the one way that is hidden from the wise and prudent but revealed unto babes.

It needs to be emphasised again and again that the authentic mystic does not affect a special would-be-esoteric attitude and manner. He abhors all those quasi-spiritual affectations which the writer of *The Cloud of Unknowing* shrewdly terms "monkey tricks of the soul." He detests eccentricity, and looks upon an affectation of singularity as specially hateful to God. Gaiety and robust good sense are his distinguishing characteristics. To describe the type is so difficult that one may search literature in vain for a "speaking likeness." Perhaps Coventry Patmore, in spite of his exaggerated recoil from anything that may fit into the framework of ordinary "Church piety," comes nearest the mark, and conveys a hint of that astringent yet alluring humour which is a characteristic of the mystic saint. "There is nothing outwardly" (he remarks) "to distinguish a saint from a common person . . . the saint has no fads,

and you may live in the same house with him and never find out that he is not a sinner like yourself, unless you rely on negative proofs, or obtrude lax ideas upon him, and so provoke him to silence. He may impress you, indeed, by his harmlessness and imperturbable good temper . . . and by never seeming to have much use for his time when it can be of any service to you; but on the whole he will give you an agreeable impression of general inferiority to yourself. You must not, however, presume upon this inferiority so far as to offer him any affront; for he will be sure to answer you with some quiet and unexpected remark, showing a presence of mind—arising, I suppose, from the presence of God—which will make you feel you have struck rock, and only shaken your own shoulder. . . . I have known two or three such persons, and I declare that but for the peculiar line of psychological research to which I am addicted, and hints from others in some degree akin to these men, I should never have guessed they were any wiser or better than myself or any ordinary man of the world with a prudent regard for the common proprieties." [1]

The conventionally religious always demand from their saints some degree of pious attitudinising; that is why the genuine mystic has in all ages found it easy to preserve his incognito. Even in times of the most intense spiritual exaltation, it is given to the true mystic to conceal the flame he bears beneath that garment of sober and seemly social prudence wherewith God "guards the honour of His friends."

[1] *The Rod, the Root and the Flower*—"*Magna Moralia*," xiv.

CHAPTER III

THE PSYCHIC PHENOMENA OF MYSTICISM

The majority, almost, of men learn God from visions.

TERTULLIAN.

We forget, whilst arguing industriously on these matters, that it is really as impossible for those who have never experienced a voice or vision to discuss it with intelligence, as it is for stay-at-homes to discuss the passions of the battlefield on the materials supplied by war correspondents.

EVELYN UNDERHILL.

The frontiers between sense and spirit which are the devil's hunting-grounds.

COVENTRY PATMORE.

SYNOPSIS

The present stage of the controversy: reaction against rationalism, naturalism, and emergence of a more enlightened doctrine of revelation and inspiration—Limits of our inquiry. I. Practical difficulties: can we trust a message which comes through abnormal, if not morbid, channels?—Does auto-suggestion explain anything?—The mystics on psychic experiences: St. Teresa, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, St. John of the Cross—Are psychic phenomena negligible?—Visionary experiences inseparable from the spiritual intuitions and great activities they evoke—The place of visionary experience in Scripture—Psychic adventures perilous, but unique, vehicles of spiritual apprehension—The neural side of psychic phenomena: "mystic ill health"—Miss Underhill's view of St. Paul's "thorn in the flesh." II. What is to be our attitude to psychic phenomena?—Validity does not depend upon objectivity—Normal and abnormal hallucination—The ultimate criterion—Do psychic experiences add anything "new" to the mystic's knowledge?—Stigmatisation: St. Francis de Sales and Dr. Rufus M. Jones on the stigmata of St. Francis—Psychic experiences not "abnormal"—What constitutes a vocation to the mystic life?

CHAPTER III

THE PSYCHIC PHENOMENA OF MYSTICISM

"I WILL come now to visions and revelations of the Lord." To determine the place of ecstatic and kindred states in mystical experience and their value for the soul's apprehension of God has always been a most difficult matter. For a time any attempt at serious discussion was practically foredoomed to failure, because it involved the impossible task of bringing together two attitudes which were not only diametrically opposed to each other, but had no common "universe of discourse" and each of which resolutely closed the door upon anything like genuine inquiry and examination. On the one hand, a rationalistic philosophy and a naturalistic science had relegated all psychic phenomena to the realm of pathology and delusion; on the other hand, an uncritical and literalist faith, founded upon a theology which reduced God to an arbitrary thaumaturge, insisted upon the Divine and objective nature of all mystic states, holding them to be direct "supernatural" revelations, too sacred for analysis or argument. By far the larger number of such unqualified believers in the objectivity of visions held that genuine examples of such "revelations of the Lord" were confined to the Bible and, more often than not, exchanged their massive credulity for an attitude of

cold scepticism where extra-Biblical examples of such experiences were concerned. But this did not affect the principle of the matter; two entirely irreconcilable attitudes which could not even be brought to accept a common basis of controversy stood opposed to each other. To-day, however, these intractable and cast-iron conceptions are rapidly giving way to more reasonable and arguable positions on either side. A healthy reaction against rationalism and naturalism and a more intelligent conception of revelation and inspiration make fruitful discussion possible, and, on the whole, the tendency is towards the rehabilitation of psychical phenomena as legitimate accompaniments of the mystical life, if not as essential elements in its mechanism. The most formidable obstacle to the reasonable appreciation of these phenomena is a mechanical laboratory psychology, which airily brackets the visions of St. Teresa with the hallucinations of an anæmic schoolgirl under the elastic term of hysteria, and which relegates St. Paul to the sanatorium with the neurotic victim of mediumship. But, on the whole, there is a marked change of opinion with regard to mystic phenomena. Superstitious credulity and shallow scepticism are alike yielding to an attitude at once more enlightened and more modest.

I

A full and adequate discussion of the subject is obviously outside the scope of an inquiry into the meaning and value of Mysticism as a whole. It demands the technical and detailed treatment of the

psychological specialist, and students who wish to make a more special study of it are referred to the works of Flournoy, Delacroix, James Cutten, Schofield, Ribot, Le Roy,[1] and other well-known investigators; while for a brief but most comprehensive and illuminating discussion Miss Underhill takes first rank.[2] In these pages we are concerned with the subject only as it affects the inquirer whose main interest is religious rather than scientific. What is to be his attitude towards the psychic phenomena which he finds recorded in mystical literature? How will they affect his spiritual endeavour to enter for himself into that direct and vital contact with Reality which we call the mystic experience?

On the face of it, these phenomena affect us with a sense of the weird and abnormal. We do not need the pronouncement of the laboratory psychologist to inspire us with misgiving as to the complete sanity of those who experience them. We read the writings of the great mystics, and their authentic spiritual insight and convincing assurance of communion with God attract us mightily. But we also note how, over and over again, the very insight and splendour of conviction which influence us so deeply are described as the direct outcome of visions, locutions, and other unfamiliar psychic states which stir us to more or less active and definite suspicion. And so the question is forced upon us whether we can and may trust spiritual intuitions and convictions which sprang from so doubtful a source. Such phenomena

[1] See Bibliography.
[2] *Mysticism*, pp. 319-356, 427-452.

suggest the morbid, or, at any rate, the deceptive, to our unaccustomed minds; must not the result of such states be little, if anything, more than the sickly delusion of a self-hypnotising emotion? And if we yield to the responsive impulse which would urge us, too, to make trial of the "Mystic Way," shall we not also be caught in a net of hallucination, so that the coveted experience may, in the end, take more from our personality than it gives—may, in fact, shatter the spiritual vessel in the act of filling it?

Thus it happens that even while we shrink from the coarse, purblind interpretation of the laboratory psychologist at his worst, we are grateful to him for a term which seems to relieve us of our misgivings without insulting the seers we have learnt to reverence—the term auto-suggestion, with its comforting implication that what alarmed us as apparently a cerebral lesion was a merely normal instance of religious subjectivity. But when we come to examine this reassuring term, it does not appear as satisfactory as we first believed. Auto-suggestion implies a self to which something is suggested and a self that suggests. What is that larger suggesting self? The problem here is parallel to that which arises in every thinking mind when reflecting upon the common phenomenon of religious doubt. In every case of genuine doubt we have the self asking questions which it cannot answer. Try to escape it as we may, we have, in every instance of genuine doubt, the activity of a transcendent self whose inquisition leaves us dumb—a "more than self," continuous and bound up with the "self," yet none the less distinct. The same is

true of the psychic phenomena of Mysticism. To label them auto-suggestion is only to substitute one unknown for another. "Auto-suggestion," when predicated of experiences which, unlike the morbid disturbances of hysteria, contribute to the ennobling of life, is as great a mystery as that which it is meant to solve. As Dr. Rufus Jones reminds us, the word explains nothing, and leaves us to conclude "either that the personal self is a bottomless affair, carrying within itself infinite unexplored chambers and undreamed-of energies which sometimes come into play, or that the personal self is bosomed on a larger Realm of Consciousness from which we draw our being into the bounds of individuality, and with which we may *correspond*. . . . And auto-suggestion may be only another way of saying that God and man are conjunct, and that, in the deeps of the soul, beyond our power of knowing how, Divine suggestions come to human consciousness." [1] This much is clear, that unless we are still content to accept a crudely external and anthropomorphic conception of God as acting upon the soul "from the outside," we must conceive of Divine inspiration and revelation as a state in which the soul is conscious of something other and more than itself, which is yet known to be more really and intimately itself than any other influence it has ever experienced. We may be modern and call this state auto-suggestion, or we may, with St. Paul, say it is "I, yet not I." In either case we stand before a mystery of life which defies dissection in a psychological laboratory.

[1] *Studies in Mystical Religion*, Introduction, pp. xxxi-xxxii, xxxiii.

But at this point the present-day writer on Mysticism steps in and assures the disturbed inquirer that he need not bother himself very much with these phenomena after all, seeing that the very mystics who experienced them laid little stress upon them, and, indeed, deprecated them as needlessly confusing, if not positively dangerous. At best, these writers remind us, the great masters of the spiritual life assign to these phenomena a very low place in the mystic ladder of ascent, regarding them at best as encouragements to beginners who might otherwise be easily appalled by the naked austerity of a purely spiritual discipline, and ranking them with the "beggarly elements" which full-grown souls leave behind them. Again and again they warn their disciples that such experiences must be subjected to the most stringent tests, assuring them that what seems most divine may be most truly the work of Satan, and that even where the experience is palpably "from above," it may easily be perverted by our pride and vanity to the soul's undoing. Passages might be multiplied on this point. St. Teresa, herself abounding in visions and locutions, brings the sharpest edge of her shrewd and reality-loving mind to bear upon their analysis. She is tireless in "trying the spirits whether they be of God," and does so with quick, decisive touch, convinced that "Satan quickly betrays himself." That she found the proof of satanic origin in the sterility of given psychic experiences is clear from a well-known passage concerning locutions in which she assures her spiritual children that "words formed by the

understanding effect nothing, but when our Lord speaks it is *at once word and work*." [1] It is interesting to note that she fully recognised the possibility of auto-suggestion, but that the point she is concerned about is not whether a given experience is "objective" or "subjective," but whether it comes from "above" or from "below." And, as we have seen already, she settles this question by what must be termed pragmatic tests. Does a given experience make for moral and spiritual enlargement? is her constant cry. Is it fruitful or sterile? Auto-suggestion is also the bugbear of the penetrative and humorous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, who has much that is quaintly wise to say about these "monkey tricks of the soul" which delude ill-balanced persons into deeming themselves the subjects of supernatural revelation. Such persons, he remarks, thinking to encompass Spirit with their senses, "turn their bodily wits inwards to their bodies against the course of nature; and strain them, as they would see inwards with their bodily eyes, and hear inwards with their ears, and so forth of all their wits, smelling, tasting, and feeling inwards . . . and then as fast the devil hath power for to feign some false light or sounds, sweet smells in their noses, wonderful tastes in their mouths; and many quaint heats and burnings . . . in their members." [2] His characterisation of a certain type of visionary who claims to have climbed into the third heaven would satisfy the most rationalistic

[1] *Autobiography*, p. 215.
[2] *The Cloud of Unknowing*, pp. 237-238.

psychiatrist in point of sheer contemptuous coolness. "They stare in the stars," he says mordantly, "as if they would be above the moon, and hearken when they shall hear any angel sing out of heaven. These men will sometime, with the curiosity of their imagination, pierce the planets and make an hole in the firmament to look in thereat. . . . Some of these men the devil will deceive most wonderfully. For he will send a manner of dew—angels' food they ween it to be—as it were, coming out of the air, and softly and sweetly falling in their mouths; and therefore they have it in custom to sit gaping as they would catch flies." [1]

An equally merciless and more profound critic of psychical phenomena was St. John of the Cross, in whom suspicion of all so-called "supernatural" revelations was carried to its extreme point. In a passage which might have been written by a mid-Victorian evangelical, he asserts that the man who desires "to know anything by extraordinary supernatural ways implies a defect in God, as if He had not given us enough when He gave us His only Son.[2] . . . One good work, or act of the will, wrought in charity, is more precious in the eyes of God than that which all the visions and revelations of heaven might effect. Many souls to whom visions have never come are incomparably more advanced in the way of perfection than others to whom many have been given." [3] His aversion to psychic phenomena carries in it a suggestion of positive fear,

[1] *The Cloud of Unknowing*, pp. 254-255.
[2] *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, p. 186.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 195.

and thus he urges his readers not merely to avoid placing any reliance upon such experiences, let alone encouraging them, but to "fly from them without even examining whether they be good or evil. For, inasmuch as they are exterior and in the body, there is the less certainty of their being from God. It is more natural that God should communicate Himself through the spirit—wherein there is greater security and profit for the soul—than through the sense, wherein there is usually much danger and delusion; because the bodily sense decides upon and judges spiritual things, thinking them to be what itself feels them to be, when in reality they are as different as body and soul, sensuality and reason."[1]

This consensus of conviction among mystics of all Churches and ages tempts us to escape from a difficult situation by reminding ourselves that psychic phenomena do not in any sense belong to the essence of Mysticism, and may therefore be safely left to the tender mercies of the psychological expert. We are only too ready to assure ourselves that they constitute the abnormal element in Mysticism, and to fortify ourselves with Baron von Hügel's statement (unassailable enough within its intended limits) that "the downright ecstatics and hearers of voices and seers of visions have all, wherever we are able to trace their temperamental and neural constitution and history, possessed and developed a definitely peculiar psycho-physical organisation."[2]

But, scarcely have we ensconced ourselves in a

[1] *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, p. 200.
[2] *The Mystical Element of Religion*, vol. ii., p. 42.

sheltered position so strongly fortified by expert opinion, than we are shaken out of our new-found security. In accordance with our finding, we proceed to the task of separating the normal and spiritual from the abnormal and psychic elements in mystical literature, but on the very threshold we are brought to a standstill. Even the most rigid theorist, if he be honest, cannot go very far without discovering that, like all real worlds, the world of mystical experience cannot be cut in two with a hatchet. Speaking ideally, it is quite easy to picture the perfect mystic entirely guiltless of any aberrations into the psychic realm; nor is it difficult to abstract the fine spiritual sayings of the great mystics from the rest of their life and work and view them beneath the protecting glass of meditative appreciation. But such abstraction cannot, in the long run, satisfy us. It is another instance of the unsatisfying delusion of a fragment of *nature morte*—a dull, hard-edged lump cut out of the warm, living landscape as with a knife: it not only utterly fails to convey the magical quality of the whole, but, in its correct deadness, fatally misrepresents it. Try as we may, the spiritual acquisitions and discoveries of the great mystics are for the most part more or less directly related to certain visionary and auditory experiences which very few of them lacked. It is not too much to say, indeed, that most, if not all, of their most fruitful and dynamic intuitions and their most influential and redemptive activities were inspired by psychic experiences. This is, be it remembered, a common note of all seership not generally recognised as

mystical, and we need not go beyond the Scriptures to find ample proof. Elijah's recognition of God as free Personality and the spiritual Force behind all phenomena; Isaiah's conception of the Divine holiness; Ezekiel's conviction of the regenerating power the Spirit; Peter's perception of a supra-national God—all these and many other creative and fructifying intuitions of the human spirit were given to the world through visionary and auditory experiences.

Nor does this hold true in the realm of thought alone. The world's greatest doers have also been made conscious of their high calling in moments of vision and ecstasy. When the Voice spake to Moses out of the burning bush, it was to send him on a heroic national mission. When the nameless Captain of the Lord's host appeared unto Joshua, it was to bid him take Jericho. When the Hebrew prophets dreamt strange dreams and saw soul-shaking visions, it was that they might "go and tell this people" that would hound them from the shelter of spiritual ecstasy with blows and stones. When Jesus appeared to the wistful, silent longing of Mary, it was that she who loved to sit silent in the house of contemplation might run and tell her story to the disciples. When St. Paul was apprehended on the Damascus road, his stricken soul was immediately moved to cry out, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" Throughout the history of mystical religion psychic experiences have shown themselves to possess a "life-value," and never failed to "validify themselves in action." [1] Religious and humanitarian reforms,

[1] Rufus M. Jones, *Studies in Mystical Religion*, Introduction, p. xxxi.

the exodus of whole nations and races from spiritual bondage and intellectual darkness into a large land of freedom and clear light, the rescue of great ideas from externalisation and petrifaction, the widening of the frontiers of human thought and the enlarging and deepening of the human heart—all such great and universally efficacious movements have been led by men who saw the "pattern" of their endeavour on the Mount of Vision, and received their commission from the Voice that has never been heard with the hearing of the ear.

We cannot therefore separate mystic thought from mystic experience, the spiritual pioneer from the ecstatic visionary, in this facile fashion. Ideally separable, the two elements are inextricably intertwined in actual life. In spite of the contrary conviction expressed in the writings of the mystics themselves—a fact easily explained by their wise fear of pride aud self-deception and their instinctive emphasis upon that which is inward—psychic experiences have ever been the often unrecognised vehicles of their profoundest and most far-reaching intimations of the Eternal. That such experiences are easily counterfeited and always fraught with peril is obvious; that they are not themselves acts of spiritual apprehension, but only a possible means to it, is equally evident; but neither of these elementary truisms can lessen their significance or justify us in belittling them. The mystics were entirely right in going beyond the psychic phenomenon to the spiritual Power of which it is a vehicle and which could act independently of all

such means. They were right in warning the young and the unstable against cultivating a form of experience whose counterfeit deceived the very elect. But in estimating their reiterated warnings against relying upon and encouraging visionary experiences, we must not forget that, for the most part, these warnings were written by men and women who themselves owed their deepest insight into the nature of God to the experiences which they subjected to such searching tests. What they so sanely and deeply probed was the very stuff of their spiritual life, the raw material of their most exalted thought, their most Christlike activity—the sacred Bread and Wine, which was transubstantiated, not by priestly magic on the altar, but by the action of their assimilating love, into the very Body and Blood of Christ.

That those mystics who abound in visionary and auditive experiences were distinguished by a peculiar and highly sensitised psycho-physical organisation is undeniable, but this does not mean that the possession of such an organisation constitutes in itself a sufficient predisposing cause. On the one hand, the fact that rudimentary mystical feeling is extraordinarily widespread and often found in the most unlikely persons would show that in an elementary and undeveloped form the mystic consciousness is present in most religious souls. On the other hand, the presence of the temperamental and neural constitution commonly defined as "mystical" more often than not issues in degraded forms of occultism, in hysteria and in other nervous disorders, without for a single moment producing anything that shows

the marks of authentic mystical vision or audition. Moreover, what we often so rashly assume to be the predisposing cause of mystical experience may be not a cause but an effect. Supposing we admit with the rationalising psychologist that St. Paul was an epileptic, it still remains to be shown that his epilepsy was the cause, and not rather the effect, of the moral and spiritual upheaval which he experienced on the way to Damascus. When we duly consider the heroic quality of the lives of the great mystics—their unreserved submission to the most exacting forms of mental and spiritual discipline, their often extreme asceticism, and their unremitting and strenuous external activities in Church and State, hospital and mission field—we shall be less easily persuaded to attribute their vision of God to the stimulus of frayed and twisted nerves. We shall rather be inclined to believe that a very large part, if not the whole, of the physical disabilities from which many of the great mystics suffered was not the explanation but the result of a spiritual life so intense as to strain the earthly vessel to breaking point. Miss Underhill calls such physical disabilities as are the outcome of visionary experiences " mystic ill-health," [1] and cites St. Paul's " thorn in the flesh " as an example of the penalty the body has to pay for the painful delight of a spirit caught up into the third heaven.[2] It is quite clear, however, that no such hypothesis is needed to account for the infirmity of one whose years were spent " in journeyings often, in perils of waters,

[1] *Mysticism*, pp. 70 *et seq.*
[2] *The Mystic Way*, p. 174.

in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen . . . in weariness and . . . watchings often, in hunger and thirst . . . in cold and nakedness." [1] His manifold hardships, his arduous labours, and the ill-treatment that was repeatedly meted out to him are quite sufficient to explain the ill-health that dogged his steps to the end. But Miss Underhill carries conviction when she cites Plotinus, St. Bernard, the two SS. Catherine, St. Teresa, and St. John of the Cross as instances in which distinctly mystical activities have so reacted upon the body as to produce pains and disturbances which could not be traced to any other cause but were clearly due to the strain which a soaring spirit put upon the recalcitrant flesh. "Mystic ill-health," she tersely remarks, "is the natural result, and not the pathological cause, of the characteristic activity of the mystics." [2] It must also be noted that this mystic ill-health in no case impairs the fine mental balance or paralyses the vigorous activity of its victims; it must therefore be sharply differentiated from any and every form of hysteria. We find those afflicted with it undertaking missionary journeys under conditions which might well appal perfectly healthy persons. We find them organising and reforming religious Orders, managing large hospitals, administering public funds, leading great movements, and doing all these things with conspicuous practical acumen and success. There is nothing vague and dreamy, nothing occult and "creepy" about them. Their peculiarity does not

[1] 2 Cor. xi. 26, 27.
[2] *The Mystic Way*, p. 175.

consist in the want of anything that goes to make up full humanity, but in a something more which, while it may baffle investigation and, to that extent, be termed "abnormal," adds to and enhances every normal faculty and channel of activity.

II

What, then, is to be our attitude to these psychic phenomena? To begin with, we must steadily bear in mind that the validity of a vision or audition does not depend upon its objective reality. We can no longer believe in the objective nature of visions and auditions, but neither do we any longer imagine that the objectivity or otherwise of mystical experiences is the crucial point in question. Whatever disservice the materialistic psychologist has rendered to us, he has at least accustomed us to the term "hallucination" and rescued it from the grip of the pathologist. He has told us that hallucination of the senses is not necessarily a symptom of mental disease, but may and does occur in perfectly normal subjects, and that the ultimate test must be sought not in the mental mechanism, which is the same, but in its effects, which are poles apart in the two cases. M. Ribot puts the difference clearly and tersely when he tells us that "the one is an *evolution* and tends *towards the more*, the other is a *dissolution* and tends *towards the less*."[1] M. Récéjac, whose treatment of the psychological side of Mysticism is particularly suggestive, sums the matter up by saying that "in hallucination

[1] Quoted by M. Récéjac in *Essay on the Bases of the Mystic Knowledge*, p. 162.

through Idea (normal hallucination) the dominating emotion comes from the active personality, and Reason, by means of attention, dominates the organic disturbances. The contrary takes place in pathological hallucinations: the consciousness is confused, because Reason has ceased to belong to itself. . . . The cause of the second class of hallucinations must always be looked for in some defect of personality, some moral alienation of the ego, either originating in the subject or inherited." [1]

To a large extent the attitude of the reverent inquirer into these experiences has been analogous to that of the naïve Catholic believer in sacramental transubstantiation. The mistake of both has been a tendency to ascribe sanctity to the "elements"—the symbolic representations through which the experience is given—rather than to the spiritual reality which they convey to the soul, and which is manifested through them. It is in relation to their life-enhancing quality that we must study these phenomena. They are of value to us only in as far as we can trace in them the genesis of great illuminating, purifying and fructifying forces which we see wrought into the life and teaching of the mystics. It is their assimilation of the visionary "elements" that matters, the play of their consecrated reason upon what was given them in a flash of transcendent symbolical intuition, their practical realisation of it in fruitful contemplation and redemptive service. We must remember that the goal of the mystic is not the passing flash of vision, but "the blessed country

[1] *Essay on the Bases of the Mystic Knowledge*, p. 162.

which is no mere vision, but a home." On the other hand, this principle must not be strained to imply that only those visions whose permanent effect upon the personality can be *traced* are valid. The spirit of man again and again wins heights which it is not competent to keep, and sees promised lands upon which it is not yet permitted to set foot. Far more than we dream of, we live by unrecognised and untraceable influences, and the vision which is deplored as a mere elusive glint of heavenly glory, too swift and dazzling to be woven into the mesh of life, may be that Bread from Heaven in the strength of which we journey through the wilderness for forty years. Still, it must be our rule to judge of mystical phenomena by their practical effects upon life and thought. The vision itself may be hid in darkness, but its consequences should be plain for the average man to read.

It has been often objected that mystical experiences are, after all, only the objectivisation of ideas already in the mind. They do not add anything new to the treasury. They represent thoughts and memories presented in concrete and pictorial form rather than the soul's effort to grasp a message from beyond itself, to translate the high language of the Spirit into the homely vernacular of the senses. The point to note here is clearly the ambiguity of such words as "new" and "beyond." Mystical experience does not add anything "new" to our knowledge. To insist that it does is to pass from Mysticism into the nebulous realm of theosophy. Mystics, like other human

beings, receive their knowledge through ordinary rational channels. When it seems to them that an entirely new truth has been revealed through a vision, one of two things has really happened; either a forgotten truth has been recalled so vividly and forcibly as to impress the sense of a new discovery upon the mind, or thoughts which have long been shaping through hours of brooding meditation, but which failed to come to actual birth, are made explicit and articulate to the mind, which cannot recognise them in the finished form. Very often things that were learnt almost automatically in childhood, or were conventionally accepted in the course of reading, are suddenly flashed upon the screen of the innermost consciousness and seen to be of supreme import.

It is therefore idle to assert that visions which are clearly made up of elements already existing in the mind—*e.g.*, many of the visions of Blessed Angela de Foligno, which were evidently suggested by the frescoes in the churches of Assisi and the valley of Spoleto—are of doubtful value. Knowledge is never our own until it becomes part of the very stuff of our life, and the mystic experience through which it is thus vitally incorporated into our substance *does* add something "new" to our personality, and does so in the only real sense in which anything "new" can come to us. As we trace the life-history of individual mystics, we find again and again how visions and auditions which were palpably wrought out of the subject's previous knowledge and experience came to make all things new: clothing a half-lost ideal

in robes of undeniable authority; cutting through mists of indecision with a clear, sharp word of command, speaking undreamed counsels of perfection into the groping soul, cleaving a shining pathway of thought through the jungle of perplexity, conferring an unexpected gift of insight, bringing order out of confusion, flashing light upon the darkness, leading the spirit out into a large place. Not one of these visions is "new," as the critical psychologist and philosopher counts newness; but once we cease from dissecting them as dead specimens and see them in their place, embedded in lives of commanding power and creative fertility, we know them to be manifestations of the new-creating energy of God. There will always, of course, remain a distinction between visions which are manifestly the soul's deciphering of a message given for the first time, and those which are clearly the pictured reflection of what was already in the mind. But no sharp line of demarcation can be drawn—very probably most of the great dynamic visions were a compound of *both* kinds—and we cannot affirm that one is of greater value than the other. They must be measured by the extent to which they minister to the enlarging and deepening of the religious personality and to the building up of the life of communion with God.

A fairly common view of psycho-mystical phenomena is that expressed by Dr. Rufus Jones when he says with reference to the stigmata of St. Francis that such experiences are "a point of weakness rather than a point of strength. Instead of proving the marks of a saint, the stigmata are the marks

of emotional and physical abnormality." [1] The latter part of this argument has been answered already. Stigmata, like all other forms of mystical experience, may be the marks of such abnormality, or may not. That stigmatisation is an instance of abnormal psycho-physical parallelism is plain; but this does not affect the question as to whether it is a sign of weakness or of strength in any given case. Where it takes its rise in pure hysteria, it is, of course, the former; but dare we come to this conclusion in a case like that of St. Francis, where it was clearly the outcome of a living, adoring sympathy with the Redeemer which imprinted its wounds upon the body, welding soul and sense in one by the fusing flame of pure love? What can there be in common between a spiritual energy which writes its law upon tables of quivering flesh, and the numerous neurotic stigmatisations which superstition has exalted into sacraments of sanctity? The stigmata of St. Francis were a real transfixion of his inmost soul with the wounds of Christ and—this is the crucial point—initiated a new phase of sacrificial outpouring of his life for his brethren. In the case of the neurotic subject, it signalises a farther stage in the development of the disease, and while it may be accompanied by extreme devotional fervour and an extraordinary quickening of the imagination, *it does not confer any solid gifts of spiritual insight, nor does it inspire to heroic activity*. St. Francis de Sales rightly points out that such an experience as that of St. Francis of Assisi is due to the action of "love bending its whole strength of will to comply with and conform to the

[1] *Studies in Mystical Religion*, p. 165.

Passion of the Well-beloved, so that the very soul, no doubt, was transformed into a second crucifix. Then the soul, as form and mistress of the body, using its power over the body, imprinted on it the sorrowful wounds which had wounded its Lover just as He had suffered them. *Love is very wonderful, that it can so sharpen the imagination as to penetrate through all to the outermost.*" [1]

We are left, then, with the conclusion that genuine visionary experiences are not "abnormal" in the pathological sense; they are, indeed, entirely normal *to the subject who experiences them*, and vindicate their normality by adding to every noble faculty of his being. One half of our alarm at the very thought of such experiences arises from our confounding of the normal with the average. No genuine spiritual height can ever be attained along the path of the average. It is in our steady and unremitting struggle with the average that our salvation lies: to conform to the average is to lose one's soul. In moments of natural mystic feeling, when the beautiful tremulous life of a spring landscape enters into us till we are made one with it; in moments of heroic resolve and self-donation, when the voice of duty comes to us from beyond ourselves and we are conscious of contact with ultimate Reality—in such moments we know ourselves to stand upon the confines of a new and strange world, and that it is the tyranny of the average that keeps us from entering. Who knows but that at such moments the difference between ourselves and the mystics is simply that they recognised these

[1] *Traité de l'Amour de Dieu*, I., vi., Chap. XIV.

fugitive intimations of the Beyond as a Divine call and dared to obey it, while we, in bondage to convention and in dread of being accounted strange, if not mad, are disobedient to the heavenly vision!

It is often said that the force which creates the mystic is a natural unquenchable desire for the *Mysterium Magnum*, an inborn hunger of the soul, a sick craving of the very flesh for the living God. This is only partly true, at least if *consciousness* of such a desire is implied. The gay and graceful St. Francis arrested in the middle of pleasant easy-going Italian life; Blessed Angela de Foligno driven from a course of overt sin to the confessional by nothing deeper or more spiritual than a superstitious fear of hell fire; St. Catherine of Genoa dragging herself to confession against her will, a disillusionised, world-weary woman of twenty-six with a taste neither for pleasure nor for God—all these are instances of initiation into the mystic way without any conscious predisposing desire. And it may well be that our moments of transcendental æsthetic feeling or moral impulsion, of spiritual quickening and religious upheaval—moments which come into the life of the most average human being—constitute a vocation for the mystic life, a call to make a more intimate and experimental communion with God. It may or it may not be so; the decision belongs solely to the individual concerned and no stranger intermeddleth therewith. One test is always applicable and has the approval of the great masters of the spiritual life. If there be any inclination to cultivate mystical experiences from a desire for

occult knowledge or power or from a curiosity to explore the supersensual world, then such an inclination should be most strenuously resisted by the soul that values its own integrity. Nor is the natural craving for joy and for the comfort and exhilaration that come of communion with God to be taken as the mark of an authentic vocation. The only true mystic motive is the love which desires, not the gifts of God, but God Himself, and which cannot rest until it is transformed to the Divine will and imbued with the Divine thought. It does not despise knowledge, but broods long and patiently over what it has seen in the sanctuary; neither does it despise joy or deprive itself of pleasure. But its beginning and its end, its driving power and its substance, is *disinterested love*. With St. Catherine of Genoa it desires, not anything that comes forth from God, but God only; with Dame Gertrude More it testifies that "to give all for love is a most sweet bargain," and cries out in its passionate moments, "Let me love or not live." Such love is continents removed from the flabby religious emotion that passes under that name. It is neither sentimental nor nebulous. It is the intelligent and deliberate identification of the soul with the mind and purposes of God, and involves a sharing of the sacrificial life of Christ. It imposes an inexorable discipline and commits to a war from which there is no discharge.

CHAPTER IV

THE CONTEMPLATIVE IDEAL

That tender and reverent listening at the feet of Wisdom which is the true and acceptable idleness.

COVENTRY PATMORE.

He who would experience the divine union must live altogether in God, in such a manner as to satisfy his superior instinct in all its energy interior and exterior. Love must transport him to the mountain where the creature dies in God: wherein she dies to herself and to all she calls her own, where she submits herself implicitly with all her powers to the transforming action of the incomprehensible Truth, which is God. The act of life must drive man outwardly to the practice of the virtues; the act of death must drive him into God in the depth of his own being. These are the two movements of the perfect life united as matter and form, as soul and body.

RUYSBROECK.

SYNOPSIS

The reaction from pragmatism—The influence of the present war. I. The practicality of the great mystics—The mystics not practical in the present-day sense—Their relation to the monastic ideal—Their message a protest against the popular apotheosis of the practical—The mystic, even when most active, essentially a contemplative. II. Mr. R. H. Coats on the ethical weakness of Mysticism—His misinterpretation of "taking leave of virtues"—Contemplation not mere feeling or sterile absorption—Richard of St. Victor on spiritual fruitfulness—The moral degeneracy of mystical groups—The Beghards and the Brethren of the Free Spirit—Doubtful character of the historical evidence—Antinomianism not peculiar to mystics—The root of ethical weakness a defective doctrine of God—Ruysbroeck upon false contemplatives and spiritual loafers. III. The charge of pious heartlessness against the mystics—Its baselessness—Margery Kempe, of Lynn—St. Catherine of Siena—Her realisation of the organic unity of mankind—A popular misinterpretation of Lady Julian—The mystic's attitude to sin and evil determined by his fundamental conception of God—Miss Underhill and Bishop Chandler: a contrast. IV. The mystic's consciousness of social obligations also ultimately determined by his theology—St. Catherine of Siena; Jacob Boehme; Thomas Traherne—True Socialism essentially mystical—The communism of the primitive Church based upon a mystical conviction—Balance of individual and social elements in Mysticism—The perils of the contemplative life recognised by the mystics.

CHAPTER IV

THE CONTEMPLATIVE IDEAL

To ask whether vital apprehension of Reality is most surely reached by way of contemplation or by way of action is to provoke to a somewhat contemptuous impatience a generation for which the old-time rivalry between the contemplative and the active ideals simply does not exist. Let anyone propose to himself a life of contemplation as a means to an interior and experimental knowledge of God, and the world of sensibly religious folk will consider him too hopelessly mediæval to be seriously argued with. Yet this is the day, or at least the dawn, of a revival of inwardness, and on every hand there are indications that the crude and thorough-going pragmatism of yesterday is begetting its inevitable disillusionment and reaction. The intellectualism which preceded it attacked feeling in the name of reason, and left the soul, cheated of its birthright of insight and vision, with a mass of external knowledge dry as dust to the palate. Pragmatism followed and offered the much-desired escape from a tyrannous and barren speculative tradition. It opposed "pure" reason in the name of life, as it understood life, advocating a facile *solvitur ambulando* attitude which commended it to our practical and concrete temper. This congeniality to our innately practical genius promised a very long

day indeed to pragmatism, among the Anglo-Saxon peoples at any rate, but it had not appeared above the horizon very long when it was assailed on the very point which was its boasted strength. Closer examination revealed it to be not nearly as practical as it looked, for the simple reason that it acted *in vacuo*. It proposed, in the words of a blunt American critic, that we should lift ourselves by our own bootstraps. And while pragmatism is still too much with us, it is perceptibly loosening its hold, even in certain religious circles where spiritual experience had long been construed as the discovery of whatever "works" best all round. Once more men of affairs and of practical religion are prepared to listen to the thinker, to the mystic, for whom the question whether anything "works," in the popular pragmatic sense of the term, is the babbling of fools. To this result the present war has contributed not a little. People of the most narrowly and doggedly practical temperament have awakened to the fact that ideas, which they imagined to be the harmless esoteric amusement of a handful of university professors and preachers, have a startling and alarmingly explosive way of acting on the practical plane and flinging nations and continents into a cauldron of seething passions.

I

But while there is an increasing readiness to consider ideals which do not bear their pragmatic justification on the surface, interpreters of Mysticism are still, for the most part, unduly apologetic and negative.

Their main concern is not so much the positive, constructive exposition of the mystical ideal and the demonstration of its value for our own day, as the defence of the great mystics against the undeserved charge of pious futility and sentimental dreaming, and the attempt to prove them to have been, on the contrary, the most severely and efficiently practical of persons. In some popular interpretations this apologetic tendency is so disproportionately prominent that the naïve reader might be left with the impression that Plotinus elaborated his obscure philosophy and passed through his severe ecstatic experiences with the express purpose of fitting himself for the more important duties of a trustee and a manager of estates, and that St. Catherine of Siena wrote her *Dialogues* by way of a mild relaxation from her strenuous ecclesiastical activities. One frequently finds, for instance, in popular expositions of Mysticism, that the *only* reference to such a master-mystic as St. Catherine of Genoa consists of a quotation from Baron von Hügel to the effect that throughout the seventeen years of her work, first as hospital nurse, then as matron, her mystic consciousness did not interfere with her devotion to duty or lessen her efficiency. There is, of course, room for such reminders that intense spirituality has nothing in common with inefficiency, but rather begets carefulness and whole-hearted concentration in the ordinary business of life. But to over-labour this point in what purport to be expositions of mystical religion is to invite from the plain, sensible reader the objection that, after all, history bristles with names

of great men and women whose work of practical philanthropy may conveniently be studied without any obscure and irritating admixture of Mysticism.

After a long period of one-eyed and hostile criticism which branded the mystics as idle dreamers, it was only natural that a new generation of more discerning interpreters should make it a point of honour to emphasise the great practical activities of the mystics; but their over-emphasis of the practical element, like all one-sided reactions against distorted judgments, fails to satisfy in the long run. Even while we rejoice in the long array of facts which must go to commend the mystics to our practical age, we are assailed by a doubt whether, after all, this takes us very far towards a true understanding of the real nature of Mysticism; whether, indeed, the practical activities of the mystics, important as they are, do not often obscure rather than illuminate the central secret of their life. We suspect that a closer examination of these activities in their proper spiritual atmosphere and setting would reveal the great mystics as less "practical" than a first "detached" survey might lead one to imagine. A long list of reforms and philanthropies, marshalled in quick succession and without any reference to the personalities who exercised them and the circumstances in which they arose, certainly presents an imposing mass of practicality. But let them fall into their proper place in the life of those personalities, and be clothed in no significance other than those personalities intended them to wear, and the focus immediately shifts, till we come to wonder if the great mystics were really

practical at all—*i.e.*, in our modern sense of the word.

To begin with, a steady bearing in mind of the controlling aim and purpose of Mysticism will serve to show us that the practicality of the great mystics differed radically both from the practicality of the pragmatist, whether of the schools or of the street, and from that of the modern religious symbolist and nature-mystic. It lacked two salient modern elements—joy in labour, either for its own sake or for the sake of resulting benefits to oneself or the race, and a sense of the sacramental value of work *per se*. For the mystics the goal of all striving was union with God. The means by which this union was to be reached was love, and "good works" were valued only as an expression, and by no means the only, or even the highest, expression of that love. They found their joy neither in external activity itself nor in the good that might accrue from it, but in that hidden life in God of which it was an imperfect manifestation and to which it ministered. And while, indeed, they might be said to have viewed such activity as sacramental, they held it to be sacramental only for him who had already received Christ in the depth of his soul. Such an one served Christ in His members and found Him in the cleaving of wood or the raising of a stone; but it need hardly be pointed out how far removed this is from the popular modern habit of tacitly assuming that work, by whomsoever done, can take the place of prayer or sacraments, and possesses an inherent sanctifying and illuminating force.

Such passages as the following from Ruysbroeck are often quoted in support of the opposite conviction, but in reality only confirm our contention. "Interior consolation," says Ruysbroeck, "is of an inferior order to the act of love which renders service to the poor. Were you rapt in ecstasy like St. Peter, or St. Paul, or whomsoever you will, and heard that some poor person was in want of a hot drink or other assistance, I should advise you to awake for a moment from your ecstasy to go to prepare the food. Leave God for God; find Him, serve Him, in His members: you will lose nothing by the exchange." [1] This would seem, on the surface, to favour the view that the mystics shared the modern conception of the sacramental nature of all good work. But it must be noted that Ruysbroeck does not contrast the contemplating and the active life here, but the spiritual *consolation* derived from acts of contemplation—a subordinate and entirely non-essential element in the mystic life—and the love that cannot but serve. And, moreover, he is speaking not of mankind in general, but of the "religious." As in Longfellow's poem it is the cloistered monk who is assured by the Lord whom he left to serve the poor, that if he had not gone the Vision would surely have vanished. The whole atmosphere and emphasis of such passages are against an interpretation that would make them parallels to the popular recitation in eulogy of "Jim Bludso," the profligate, wife-beating engine-driver who died in saving a train. Between the sentiment of such pieces—"God ain't goin' to be too

[1] *Reflections from the Mirror of a Mystic* p. 54.

hard on a man what died for men "—and the keen-edged temper of the mystics there is a wide gulf fixed.

Nor dare we blind ourelves to the fact that the activity of the great mystics—rich and heroic as it was—did *not* arise immediately out of a social or altruistic impulse, as we understand it to-day. To begin with, the great figures of classic Mysticism lived in a religious atmosphere—essentially mediæval, but persisting down to modern times—characterised by an inhuman aloofness from the joys and sorrows of mankind, a frigid unconcern in face of the evil and wrong. This aloofness, miscalled " detachment," did not, indeed, do away with altruistic activity, but it drove it into narrow channels, chilling its warm impulse and dehumanising it into a theological requirement. It stood for a depreciation of human and social relationships in the supposed interest of the soul's undivided allegiance to God, regarding them as hindrances rather than as sacramental means to sanctification. In short, it represented the monastic ideal of sanctity, and it was only natural that the great mystics should, to some extent, have been influenced by it. It would, however, be a most superficial judgment to attribute their characteristic attitude towards external activity solely to that influence. On the contrary, while the paralysing touch of monasticism is manifest in their work and life, they have always, on the whole, transcended the monastic conception; and almost all there is of warm humanity and spontaneous kindliness in mediæval religious life is traceable to them. Yet, even when their love for their fellows found its warmest and

freest expression, we are conscious that with all its glow and spontaneity it is something other, something far less "practical" and altruistic, than the modern feeling. Works of beneficence are never regarded by them as self-contained and self-sufficient, but always as part of a greater whole—of that ascent which leads to pure union with the Unseen. The driving power behind them has no "practical" aim. It gladly validifies itself in beneficent action, yet its main purpose is not to advance the interests of the race or to inspire and exemplify "practical" religion. On the contrary, whenever the soul of Mysticism speaks, it is to protest against that popular apotheosis of practicality which has been more or less characteristic of all ages. Mysticism proclaims to all generations that the man who prays is of greater spiritual importance than he who merely gives bread to the poor; that one moment of pure love towards God is worth more than the founding of fifty hospitals or churches; that interior silence is a higher activity than eloquence or influence. While never forgetting that the love of one's neighbour is part of the love of God, and that "what a man takes in by contemplation he must pour out in love," they never relaxed their insistence upon the supreme significance and value of interior activity. It follows that, so far from essaying to minimise this insistence in the interests of conciliating the modern mind, we must rather admit that to be accused of idle dreaming and futile contemplation would have been accepted by the great mystics as the unconscious tribute of those who know not by what things men live. More-

over, no assurances to the contrary can, in the end, avail to keep the shrewd and reality-loving critic who has no temperamental affinity with Mysticism from suspecting that at bottom the mystics were not practical at all, but, on the contrary, of that chill and alien type which for him is summed up in the word "contemplative." For the practical man the mystic ideal is not only sown with every eventuality of psychic degeneration, or, at least, of morbid religiosity; it is also a menace to ethical or intellectual integrity—probably to both.

II

In a short study on Mysticism as a type of English piety[1] which is of considerable interest as giving a particularly clear-cut and able expression to the characteristic objections of the practical Christian mind of to-day, the Rev. R. H. Coats asserts that Mysticism has always been weak on the ethical side, and teaches that "a life of merely contemplative and exalted feeling is in itself superior to one of moral action."[2] In seeking to illustrate this weakness from mystical literature, he hits somewhat unfortunately upon the well-known passage in *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, where the contemplative "takes leave" of virtues, declaring himself emancipated from their exacting rule.[3] Surely such words

[1] *Types of English Piety*, pp. 156-230.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 221. The contemplative Ruysbroeck has forestalled Mr. Coats's criticism: compare his strictures upon false contemplatives who "declare themselves above all commandments, beyond religious exercises, too deeply merged in grace to be concerned with action" (*Flowers of a Mystic Garden*, p. 96).

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 222 (note).

should be read by discerning souls as they were doubtlessly written—with a holy smile! They are of a piece with St. Augustine's "Love God and do what you like," and express, on the one hand, the soul's vision of so complete and instinctive an identification of herself with the good as to translate her into a region which, in the most honourable sense, is "beyond good and evil," and on the other hand, the soul's present emergence from a state of moral servitude to a state of holy freedom, from the work of a hired labourer to that of the creative artist. To conclude that he who has thus "taken leave of virtues" and entered into the love that can do as it likes has denied ethical obligations is tantamount to contending that the artist who works *con amore*, driven by his free creative impulse, is ethically inferior to the factory hand who grinds out his daily task under the foreman's eye. In fine, the mystic's half-humorous adieu to all virtues is but a playful variant on Ruysbroeck's "He only is a contemplative who is the slave of nothing, not even of his virtues,"[1] and "Pure love frees a man from himself and his acts"[2]—truths which every practical teacher and preacher who has suffered from the fussy anxiety and scrupulosity of well-meaning persons bent upon moral self-tinkering can fully appreciate.

Such a position as that represented by Mr. Coats rests upon a common misunderstanding. He assumes that by contemplation the mystics mean mere

[1] *Flowers of a Mystic Garden*, p. 45.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 89.

feeling or sterile absorption in the Infinite. As a matter of fact, mystical literature is written over from end to end with warnings against a false contemplation which is "spiritual gluttony" and fails to minister to practical righteousness. Contemplation, according to the great mystics, must issue in holiness and helpfulness, whether these be expressed in active service in the world or in saintly and unselfish living in the cloister. The vision of God is to them not a superstition, but a discipline, and they shun sterile ecstasy or absorption as the very snare of hell. All the great mystics unite in a wholesome abhorrence of religious emotion which stops short of action, of spiritual self-indulgence which sterilises rather than fructifies the energy and leaves the soul drained of its virtue. Ruysbroeck is full of warnings against such mystical dissipation; St. Teresa is bluntly explicit upon the subject; St. John of the Cross brings his dry and cutting judgment to bear upon it. Even Richard of St. Victor—troubadour of the spiritual marriage, in whom mystical emotion found unfettered expression and who dared apply the nuptial relationship, in all its implications, to the communion of the soul with God—lays wholesome emphasis upon the fruits of the spirit. The end of his spiritual marriage is not barren enjoyment and ecstasy, but fruition, and he makes it clear throughout that the soul that would seize the raptures of love and shrink from its pains and duties is unfaithful to the high vows of her betrothal. Even where the mystic feels himself called to a life of pure contemplation unrelieved by

active service, he is pledged to test his visions and revelations, not by the emotional pleasure they give him, or the feeling of exultation and transcendence which they produce, but by the measure in which they conform to the great basal principles that govern the ethical and spiritual life of the Church and the soul. Any experience which issues only in selfish enjoyment, however refined, is to be deprecated. True contemplation is not to be coveted as a luxury, but to be solemnly entered upon as a vocation involving the most severe, and often agonising, activity of soul. We may reject such a conception as morbid, but we cannot, with any pretence to fairness, regard it as otherwise than heroic. Of dreamy sentimentality and spiritual self-pleasing there is not a trace in it.

Critics often seek to prove the ethical weakness of Mysticism from history, and an undiscriminating appeal to history does not fail to produce a crop of apparently damning facts. The contemporary records of the moral delinquencies and degeneracies of the pantheistic mystics of the thirteenth century, for instance—of the Beghards, the Brethren of the Free Spirit, and other mystical groups—amply support an interpretation of Mysticism which makes it essentially anti-ethical, and traces a tendency that was only kept in check in the case of the great master-mystics by a noble moral endowment to its inevitable and disastrous climax in their followers. Closer examination, however, reveals that, as is generally the case, the " proof " from history proves

surprisingly little.[1] To begin with, the vast majority of the damaging records of mediæval mystical communities come from an inquisitorial clergy, themselves anything but dazzlingly pure of life, and were derived from renegade members of those brotherhoods who were, in not a few cases, expelled from their communities for the very offences with which they charged their former comrades. The notorious John de Brunn, whose *Confessions* reflect more dishonour upon himself and upon a priesthood which welcomed them than upon the communities they were meant to expose, is a case in point. With notable exceptions to which we shall refer presently, the evidence against these groups is derived entirely from hostile and prejudiced sources; their own writings, which were very numerous and contained the authoritative expression of their tenets, were burnt by papal edict—one of many indirect testimonies to the popularity of communities which weathered great gales of persecution and had the sympathy and support of the common people. The only reliable testimony against them is found scattered throughout the pages of Ruysbroeck, Eckhart, Tauler, and Suso, who were profoundly disquieted by the degeneracies of contemporary Mysticism and castigated them with no gentle touch. But while the witness of these great mystics is conclusive, as far as it goes, it does not imply that moral laxity was the *rule* among these groups. Its warnings and denunciations clearly refer to

[1] For a masterly sketch of the pantheistic mystics and brotherhood groups, see Rufus M. Jones, *Studies in Mystical Religion*, pp. 178-216.

individuals and small coteries which were infected by the so-called doctrine of the Free Spirit; nowhere are the groups as a whole antagonised or condemned.[1]

The appeal to history is dangerous for yet another reason. If history is hard on the mystics, it is not one whit kinder to members of evangelical Churches and sects. In point of fact, the worst that can be urged from history against a certain type of Mysticism has been urged, with a far greater force of proof, against a very widespread type of evangelical religion. Antinomianism—and the thing is larger than the word and of protean character—has been the blight of evangelical, as it has never been of mystical, religion. Since the days of St. Paul there has never been a lack of those who gave themselves up to sin the more that grace might the more abound, and to this very day isolated sects survive on the Continent which teach a naked and unashamed antinomianism, while individual examples are found everywhere. If these perversions do not stultify the evangelical doctrine of grace, it is difficult to see why the moral aberrations of weak-minded and degenerate quasi-mystics should be adduced as arguments against the ethical soundness of Mysticism.

It is also clear that any moral weakness which characterises Mysticism here and there has its root, not in the contemplative habit which pertains to

[1] It is significant to note in this connection that one of Ruysbroeck's most mature and profound works is called *The Book of the Twelve Beguines* and that its most inspired passages are put into the mouth of members of the Béguine order.

the method rather than to the substance of Mysticism, but in a defective conception of the *object* of contemplation. In other words, the question is one of theology, and we shall consider it in detail in the section dealing with Mysticism and Theology. Meanwhile it suffices to remind ourselves that what is popularly called Mysticism is, after all, only a *schema* —a method of approach whose results will be entirely determined by the nature of the goal to which approach is made. If this object be conceived in ethical and spiritual terms, as He who bids us be holy because He is holy, it will pledge the aspiring soul to a life-long warfare against every unrighteous impulse and to a process of profound, though not legalistic, self-purification. If, on the other hand, the goal of striving be conceived as union with an empty, indeterminate Absolute about which nothing but All-ness can safely be predicated, then the soul is bereft of any ethical criterion or imperative; and the whole mixed multitude of its impulses, whether chaste or licentious, may be equally referred to the inspiration of a deity whose only real attribute is all-inclusiveness. That a movement which has been influenced so constantly and profoundly by Neoplatonic, Asiatic, and (when traced to their ultimate source) Manichæan tendencies as Mysticism has ever been, should not have given a loophole to libertinism is unthinkable; on the other hand, it must not be forgotten that precisely the same influences which opened the door to licentiousness also produced an extreme asceticism. While one section of false mystics, whose most unlovely mani-

festation is seen in the eroticism of the Adamites of Paris, welcomed every impulse of flesh and spirit as divine, another section approximated to the ascetic exaggerations of the Waldenses, and among these, be it noted, were not a few of the very group that bore so evil a reputation—the Brethren of the Free Spirit.

When all this is borne in mind, as well as the overwhelming probability that comparatively small numbers, even of the libertine section, actually practised the "liberty" they preached, it will be seen that the alleged moral dangerousness of Mysticism shrinks into very small proportions—is, in fact, no greater than that which accompanies every type of religion that is not narrowly moralistic or harshly intellectual. Make *love* the alpha and omega of religion, and you introduce an element of peril: you are at once beset with every possibility of perversion. It is not in Mysticism that the peril resides, but in Christianity. To live as a Christian is to live dangerously; but what soul worthy of its Divine calling would desire to live "safely" and to miss the revelation that can only be read in the bright face of danger? Even religious eroticism is not the monopoly of the mystics. It is found in writers—one need only mention Samuel Rutherford—who were the bitterest opponents of Mysticism in their day.

It is a pity that those critics who so glibly talk of contemplation as the esoteric amusement of self-styled adepts who deem themselves superior to ethical considerations and leave practical service to "carnal" persons are not more closely acquainted with the

innumerable passages in mystical literature in which false contemplatives are chastised as with scorpions For example one need only turn to the writings of Ruysbroeck, who anatomises the vicious contemplative with merciless precision, preserving throughout the just balance of the active and passive elements in the mystic life. Thus, while he insists that even in eternal life happiness could not exist without activity, and that "interior consolation is of an inferior order to the act of love which renders service to the poor," [1] he equally insists upon the "repose of the abyss" wherein the soul is lost in a holy darkness in which "to contemplate and to know, to experience and to feel, to have and to be are one." [2] He has scathing words for the contemplative who seeks a refuge from responsibility in quietism. "Such peace," he declares, "is an outrage on God, is the crime of *lèse majesté*. . . . He who finds his peace outside of action, who yields himself to a tranquillity without performance, has lost the way. . . . This false contemplative is like a merchant who desires only profit. . . . It is spiritual luxury, the love of pleasure which, turning a man in upon himself, holds him in the prison of self, saying, 'Happiness lies there.' . . . Men of themselves set forth on this barren, erring quest, content in their self-absorption, not even seeking God by desire. It is not He who holds them in this deceptive inaction, for this is an emptiness of soul and idleness of body that surely drive the man downwards.

[1] *Reflections from the Mirror of a Mystic*, p. 54.
[2] *Flowers of a Mystic Garden*, p. 74.

. . . He who yields himself to peace devoid of activity, goodness and effort is lost. He attains but to spiritual pride and interior satisfaction and becomes an incurable. The seed of every sin lies hidden within this quiescence. It is the fall of the angels." [1] No modern decrier of quietism and passive contemplation could dispose of it more trenchantly that the thirteenth-century ecstatic, and even Ruysbroeck's most esoteric utterances do not fail of this characteristic touch of crisp common sense, nor of the robust moral feeling which we like to think is essentially modern. This emerges notably in the matchless passages in which he treats of the relation and interaction between the active and the contemplative states. At one moment he seems to exalt naked contemplation. "Pure love," he says, "frees a man from himself and his acts. . . . If we would know this in ourselves, we must yield to the Divine, the innermost sanctuary of ourselves. . . . Our love must outweigh all else, and, sinking into the very substance of the creature, find no resting place till it meets God in the abyss where He dwells alone." [2] Here the matter-of-fact reader will be overcome by impatience at a eulogy of a state which seems to him psychic rather than spiritual, and below rather than above morality and reason. But immediately he is swept back into a clearer air. "From here," continues Ruysbroeck, "comes the impulse and urgency towards active righteousness and virtue, FOR LOVE CANNOT BE IDLE. The Spirit

[1] *Flowers of a Mystic Garden*, pp. 92, 93, 98, 99.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 89.

of God, moving within the powers of the man urges them outwards in just and wise activity. . . . And the stability of righteousness remains in us." [1] Again, in speaking of that spiritual gift of intelligence which initiates men into the contemplative life, he begins by speaking of "those happy and hallowed ones who have found refuge in the great solitude of the Divinity, where the Lord possesses and enjoys His own essence; and the light fails because the Divine essence knows no human measure." But immediately he goes on to say that while Christ was "the greatest contemplative of all times," yet He was "ever at the service of men, and never did His ineffable and perpetual contemplation diminish His charity, or His exterior activity." [2]

III

Another charge brought against the mystics by Mr. Coats is that of pious heartlessness. "They have thought to become so united to God," he remarks, "as to leave all poor sinners in the mire. . . . They would rather swoon into the infinite than heal a broken heart or help a lame dog over the stile. Some might even be counted on, in the manner of the Emperor Nero, to hearken complacently to the music of their own sweet violin while the world was burning." [3]

[1] *Flowers of a Mystic Garden*, p. 90.
[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 129, 130.
[3] *Types of English Piety*, p. 219.

We have already referred to a certain element of inhumanity in mediæval sainthood, and pointed out that while the mystics did not altogether escape its baneful influence, this " holy " callousness to human pain and sin was comparatively rare among them. At their worst the mediæval mystics did not exhibit the bleak, unfeeling and sometimes explicitly cruel temper so commonly met with in the annals of " sainthood," while at their best they were the great humanising force in the religious life of their time. One need only think of St. Francis, who illuminated and warmed a whole arctic region of the spirit—a golden and irresistible sun whose magnitude obscured the many lesser lights that softened bleak skies and made little flowers of love and delight to spring up in stony places. Mystical literature abounds in passages and whole books breathing what we should call a strangely modern feeling for human pain and woe, a feeling which overflowed to our dumb brethren. Everywhere we find it fragrant of that " pure sympathising spirit " which John Woolman praised so highly in his dry and sober fashion. Take as an example of rare and persuasive charm the short record of one Margaret Kempe, an obscure precursor of Lady Julian: " When she saw the crucifix," recounts her chronicler, " or if she saw a man had a wound, or a beast; or if a man beat a child before her, or smote a horse or another beast with a whip, if she might see it or hear it, she thought she saw our Lord beaten or wounded. . . . If she saw any creature be punished or sharply chastised, . . . then would she weep for her own sin and for

compassion of that creature." [1] Again, Christ is described as saying to this most Christ-like soul: "And, daughter, I thank thee for the charity that thou hast to all lecherous men and women, for thou prayest for them and weepest for them many a tear, desiring that I should deliver them out of sin . . . and with this condition thou wouldest that each one of them should have twenty pounds a year to love and praise Me. . . . Furthermore, daughter, I thank thee for the general charity that thou hast to all people that be now in this world, and to all those that are to come unto the world's end; that thou wouldest be hacked as small as flesh to the pot for their love, so that I would by thy death save them all from damnation." [2]

With a more profound insight and a firmer grasp of spiritual principles, St. Catherine of Siena records how a revelation of "the neediness of the world" caused her to pray in the spirit of Moses that the punishment of the world's sin might fall upon her. She tells us how "a certain soul" had a selfless desire, and how this desire, which had long been great and continous, "grew much more when the First Truth showed her the neediness of the world, and in what a tempest of offence against God it lay. All this lighted the fire of her holy desire with grief for the offences, and with the joy of the lively hope, with which she waited for God to provide

[1] *The Cell of Self-Knowledge: Seven Early English Mystical Treatises*, pp. 54, 55.
[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 56, 57.

against such great evils. And since the soul seems in such communion sweetly to bind herself fast within herself and with God, and knows better His truth, inasmuch as the soul is then in God, and God in the soul, as the fish is in the sea, and the sea in the fish, she desired the arrival of the morning in order to hear mass. And when the morning came . . . she sought with anxious desire her accustomed place; and, with a great knowledge of herself, being ashamed of her own imperfection, appearing to herself to be the cause of all the evil that was happening throughout the world, conceiving a hatred and displeasure against herself, and a feeling of holy justice, with which knowledge, hatred, and justice she purified the stains which seemed to her to cover her guilty soul, she said 'O Eternal Father, I accuse myself before Thee in order that Thou mayest punish me for my sins in this finite life, and inasmuch as my sins are the cause of the sufferings which my neighbour must endure, I implore Thee, in Thy kindness, to punish them in my person.' " [1]

A curious misinterpretation of the mystical attitude towards sin and pain is seen in a not uncommon view of Lady Julian of Norwich, which represents her as "praying peacefully in her cloister" and viewing the world's pain and confusion so very much *de haut en bas* that she "may part her pale lips to murmur tranquilly 'Sin is behovable, but all shall be well, all shall be well and all manner of thing

[1] *The Dialogue of St. Catherine of Siena*, "Treatise of Divine Providence," pp. 28-29.

shall be well.' " [1] Nothing could be farther from the truth. Lady Julian saw the " behovingness " of sin in a vision which, so far from being a piece of pious armchair dreaming, was the result of her desiring " three graces by the gift of God," namely, to have mind of Christ's passion, bodily sickness, and three wounds, which are the wound of contrition, the wound of compassion, and the wound of a steadfast longing towards God.[2] It was *when pierced with these three deep wounds* that it was shown her by Christ that sin is behovable. Hers was a simple, sunny, tender soul, lacking the sombre depth and keen penetration of St. Catherine of Siena, and so the announcement that sin was behovable evoked no passionate protest from her. But she did anything but murmur *tranquilly*, " All shall be well." Quite the contrary. Bleeding from her wounds of contrition and compassion, she turned wistful eyes to Him who assured her that all shall be well, saying, " Ah, good Lord, how might all be well, for the great harm that is come by sin to Thy creatures ? " [3] And she goes on to tell how " our good Lord " made " comfortable " answer to all her questions and doubts. And her vision of the behovableness of sin, which seems to be a source of constant apprehension to a school of writers who hold it up as the warning example of the extent to which Mysticism can delude a pious soul, in no wise impaired her just and vivid sense of the sinfulness of sin. " If," she says soon

[1] *Revelations of Divine Love*, p. 56.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 5.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 60.

after, " there were laid before me all the pain that is in hell and purgatory and in earth . . . and sin, I had liefer choose all that pain than sin. . . . For all is good but sin, and nothing is wicked but sin." And again, in oft-quoted words, " To me was shown no harder hell than sin." [1]

IV

At every point the attempt to see in contemplation a source of ethical weakness or of pious heartlessness breaks down when confronted with the testimony of the mystics themselves. Throughout their writings the student who forgets the " timelessness " of all truly spiritual experience and insight is startled by a certain modernity of feeling. The above quoted passage from St. Catherine of Siena, for instance, startles by its passionate realisation of the organic unity of mankind. It is the cry of a soul which sees a slur upon its own honour in the dishonour of knaves and profligates; which feels the ruin of the outcast as its own unhealing wound, its own deepest blame; which, smitten to the core by a revelation of human sin, knows itself as the one that brought the nails which fixed humanity to its cross.

Here again it is ultimately a question of theology, and, with all that can legitimately be said about the timeless unity of mystical theology, it remains that even Christian mystics differ sharply in their funda-

[1] *Revelations of Divine Love*, p. 83.

mental conception of God. To realise this difference one need not go to such glaring and obvious contrasts as that between that most sombre mystic of the Counter-Reformation, St. John of the Cross, and the sane and serene Nature-mystic, Wordsworth, or that between George Fox and Francis Thompson. Two examples taken from recent mystical literature, both of the confessedly "Catholic" type, will serve to show how wide the cleavage may be. The first is taken from a poem, *The Likeness*, by Miss Underhill:

"Thine undaunted daughters of the slum,
Faithfully dealing with hopeless intractable life;
Fostering their broods in the dark basement,
Down at heel, slattern hair, yet radiant of love and of courage,
Fruitful of fresh souls, new strange disguises for Thee.

* * * * *

"Thy naughty ones, rebellious, cunning, adventurous,
Breaking the toys of their brothers, thrusting their tortuous lives athwart the respectable web—
These too!
Do these not exhibit Thy vigour, Thy rude inexhaustible freedom,
Correcting with flushes of passion our colourless pictures of God?

"Hast Thou Thy favourite amongst these scattered children?
Hast Thou any one of them of whom Thou canst say:
This is My beloved child?
Nay, I think not so.
Love buildeth her temple,
Its name is Life:

"It hath columns strong and lovely, deep earth-set foundations,
Gargoyles for the amusement of Thine angels, and pinnacles glad in the blue.
And the souls of Thy children shall build it; Thy mark is on every one of them.
All hast Thou made for their office,
All have their place in Thy home."

The background of such a poem—the only background out of which it could have grown—is, let us say it quite frankly, an essentially unethical conception of God. To speak of wayward souls as exhibiting the vigour, the "rude inexhaustible freedom" of God and forming gargoyles on the temple of life for the amusement of the angels is to make a confession of faith, to formulate a creed, which is *not* the faith and the creed of the Christian soul, however broadly we may define Christianity. Such utterances are not the characteristic outcome of the mystic spirit, and therefore cannot be used to prove the unethical, or anti-ethical trend of Mysticism. They are the poetic expression of a theology, a thought of God, shared to-day by thousands who make not the slightest pretence to mystical affinities.

For a direct contrast we may turn to such a book as *The Cult of the Passing Moment*, by the Bishop of Bloemfontein, who, in his earlier work, *Ara Coeli*, has given us one of the simplest and profoundest expositions of mystical theology our recent literature can boast of. Bishop Chandler is essentially a Catholic mystic. Like Miss Underhill, he is steeped in the writings of St. Teresa and St. John of the

Cross, but his reading of their intention differs most significantly from hers. Writing of religion—and to him religion always means mystical religion—Bishop Chandler says, "The nature of religion, and its distinctness from other things, are shown very strikingly in the fact that religion, unlike them, can only be approached in a spirit of penitence and self-humiliation. This spirit is, in fact, the constant characteristic of religion; it is only deepened and strengthened in the process of religious growth. Such a fact would be inexplicable if religion were merely a branch of 'humaner letters' or a synonym for philanthropic action; we do not look for humility in 'Gigadibs the literary man,' nor are we surprised at its absence in a Social Democrat or, perhaps, in a charity organiser; but we feel that it is a natural and reasonable thing, if religion is union with God, and that it is a necessary and inevitable thing if that God is Christ crucified." [1] Proceeding to define more closely the penitence and self-humiliation that spring out of a vital relationship with the Crucified, he has much to say on the fellowship of the suffering of Christ, both for ourselves and for others, on the nature and justification of vicarious penitence, and on other aspects of the matter in which the more romantic qualities of Mysticism—the qualities which make Mysticism attractive to the *dilettante*—come into view. But again and again we are reminded that the essence of that penitence which is at the root of all true religion is not a mystic absorption in the sufferings of Christ, a sensuous cult

[1] *The Cult of the Passing Moment*, p. 92.

of the Sacred Wounds, or a heroic choice of the purgative way, but simply "*a real sorrow for sin and hatred of sin.*" [1] To come to his pages straight from such rhapsodies as those of Miss Underhill is to come into a different world, to breathe a different atmosphere. It is the underlying conception of God that makes the difference—a conception, again, not exclusively mystical, but shared by those who have scant affinities with Mysticism. Miss Underhill defines Mysticism as "the expression of the innate tendency of the human spirit towards complete harmony with the transcendental order, whatever be the theological formula under which that order is understood." [2] But whatever may or may not be said as to the adequacy of such a definition, the man of good, honest sense will always feel that in the end it is not so much the innate mystic feeling as that upon which it feeds that really matters. If human history has any genuine value, if human sin and woe are of moment to God, if there is any validity in ethics, any reality in redemption, then it does matter infinitely "whether that end [the end of mystic union] be called the God of Christianity, the World-Soul of Pantheism or the Absolute of Philosophy." [3] To use such values as indifferent alternatives is to trifle with realities, to play with life itself.

And the same applies when it is not a question of a shallow view of sin, but of callousness to human suffering and failure to realise social obligations.

[1] *The Cult of the Passing Moment*, p. 94.
[2] *Mysticism*, Preface, p. x.
[3] *Ibid.*

Everything turns upon the mystic's thought of God. If He is conceived of as a vague Hegelian Absolute, blank rather than deep, which can only be reached through the dehumanising discipline of the *via negativa*, or as that heavenly "Bridegroom of the soul" to whom all creation is but a poppy-couch from which to snatch His bride and stab her awake with His kiss to possess her in timeless rapture, then the mystic's life necessarily resolves itself into a sterile quietism or a spiritual epicureanism. And the result must obviously be a de-ethicising of the personality and a tragic blindness to the fact and the horror of evil. But if, on the other hand, the God whom the mystic seeks is

> "the Lamb of God that takes
> Each living hour a world's red guilt away;"

if, in other words, his God be One who is Himself afflicted in all human affliction and nailed to the Cross by all human sin, whose ruling passion is the world's redemption, whose mind is ever bent upon His frail and struggling children, taking thought for each one with the illimitable inventiveness of Love, then the soul that seeks union with Him must seek participation in His atoning sympathy, His redemptive intentions, plans, and purposes for men. The more intimately such a soul is conjoined with its God, the more completely will it be informed with a self-sacrificing and substitutionary spirit. This the authentic representatives of mystical religion never failed to realise. So far from sinking into selfish absorption or unbridled luxury of feeling, they gave

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themselves to their brethren and were, in the deepest sense, the pioneers of the social conscience.

True, their social sense was often—and that inevitably, considering the times they lived in—restricted to the brotherhood of faith. But how nobly and sacrificially did it operate within that sphere, often (as in the case of St. Catherine of Siena) assuming with St. Paul "the care of all the Churches," and crying out, "Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not?" A widely different atmosphere and training enabled the passion for social righteousness which was deep-rooted in the brooding heart of Jacob Boehme to find a more modern expression or, if we prefer, to take the form of a return to the prophetic cry of woe upon the oppressor of the poor. With eyes ever upon that "deep door" of the soul that opens into eternity, Boehme had yet the heart at leisure from itself to note the bitter misery of him who laboured for a mere pittance. With words that sting like a lash, he castigates a Christianity which "consumes the sweat and blood of the needy" and battens upon "the sighs and groans of the poor."[1] He warns his contemporaries that a profession of Christianity which is not a practical recognition of "fraternity in the life of Christ" is an insult to God. "Thy brother's soul," he insists, "is a fellow member with thy soul";[2] and with all the prophet's urgency he pleads that possessions, goods and talents should not be held selfishly, but freely given to enrich the

[1] *The Three Principles*, XIX., 47; XXI., 32.
[2] *Forty Questions*, XII., 39.

common life of humanity and to benefit the community. And so widely different a mystic as Thomas Traherne exclaims: "O Christ, I see Thy crown of thorns in every eye; Thy bleeding, naked, wounded body in every soul; Thy death liveth in every memory; Thy crucified Person is embalmed in every affection; Thy pierced feet are bathed in everyone's tears; and it is my privilege to enter with Thee into every soul."[1]

It is not too much to assert that all true social life and effort are grounded in Mysticism. This is true historically. In a certain measure it holds true of Joseph Fels and Prince Kropotkin, as well as of Arnold Toynbee and Josephine Butler. The brotherhood of man, however conceived, is a mystical doctrine. Belief in a unity which is not a mere numerical expression, nor an arbitrary confederation dictated by self-interest, can ultimately be justified only by an appeal to that eternal world in which Christ is the Vine and we the branches. If held on any other grounds it is at the mercy of dry analysis, and will prove too flimsy to subdue the selfish individualist impulse. That is why no secular prophet, however single-minded and impassioned, has ever been able to convert our democracies to any conviction that might fairly be termed brotherhood, to anything more vital and regenerative than trades unionism. Human brotherhood is a beautiful dream, a dazzling mirage, unless it is conceived in terms of conversion. The fact of our membership one with another will remain a burden productive only of chafing and fretting, of

[1] *Centuries of Meditation*, p. 65.

mutual distrust and antagonism, until we become conscious of our common life in God. And this consciousness, as distinct from a mere sentimental acceptance of a doctrine of Divine Fatherhood, is essentially mystical. It is not gained in crowds. Each one enters the narrow gate alone and hears the secret whisper meant for no other. "My secret to myself," he says. And yet—here is the paradox of all true religion—that which has flashed upon him as the hidden ground of his most individual being also reveals itself as the hidden bond which unites him vitally with all his brother men. In the very act of secret entrance into the true life of the spirit, he has also entered into sure and inalienable possession of his brotherly rights in humanity. His consciousness of God speaking to him in the wilderness of his lonely soul and his consciousness of solidarity with every other human soul are but two sides of the same shield. The light which shone in the dark centre of his being is the light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world. The life he feels welling up in him is the life of the Vine which flows through many branches. True socialism is essentially mystical, and a socialism which is built on a non-mystical foundation must inevitably collapse, for at bottom it is but a confraternity of collective selfishness. It may be objected that the communism of the primitive Church, while profoundly religious, was not mystical; but we must not confine the term to mystical theories of life consciously held. The primitive faith was faith in a mystical fact—in the fact of a common Lord and Giver of life—and the communism of the

early Church was possible only as long as her life was truly, though unconsciously, mystical in essence.

It follows that while we shall do well to recognise certain de-ethicising and dehumanising tendencies which dog the path of Mysticism, we shall be careful to view them from the standpoint of the great mystics themselves who stigmatised them so unsparingly, and not from the standpoint of "outside criticism." The most stringent prophet of righteousness and humanity approaching Mysticism from the outside could not *feel* the degeneracies and aberrations of Mysticism as they were felt by a Ruysbroeck, a Tauler, a St. Teresa, to whom they were as leprous sores on the body of a beloved child. With relentless severity they and other great mystic saints inveighed against them, using language of naked contempt and condemnation, prescribing heroic remedies, treating delinquents with scant ceremony, yet never for a single moment suggesting the surrender of the contemplative life in the interests of a purer ethic and a more practical charity. For they knew the things by which the soul lives. They knew that but for the abandonment of some to communion with God, to the discipline of purgation and to the work of contemplation, the world would perish for lack of contact with God, asphyxiated by an atmosphere lacking the oxygen of the spirit. They were aware—no modern critic more so—that theirs was a perilous path; that the soul's thirst for God may be perverted into a thin, sour craving for esoteric adventures; that spiritual gluttony may blunt and even kill all natural human feeling, all decent moral sense; that what is

begun in the spirit may end in the flesh, and even at times in gross carnality. But they did not seek safe paths; they sought only that to which the implacable Voice called them. They took all risks, and their stainless and opulent lives invite every man who hears even a whisper of that call to follow in their train.

CHAPTER V

SOME ELEMENTS OF THE CONTEMPLATIVE LIFE

Man is no better than a leaf driven by the wind until he has completely mastered his great lonely duties. If he has no habit of retiring from all that is *world* and of conversing face to face with his inner man, if he does not, alone, invite the gaze of God, if he does not draw down upon his soul "the powers of the world to come," then he is no man yet; he has not found the life of man nor the strength of man; he is a poor, unhappy creature, sporting only with shadows, and affrighted before the real and the eternal. He owns a great house, a wonderful house, but it is shut up, and he lives outside with his fellow *cattle:* the inside is wholly unknown to him, and he has lived outside so long that he is afraid of the inside.

JOHN PULSFORD.

When first the busy, clumsy tongue is stilled,
Save that some childish, stammering words of love
The coming birth of man's true language prove:
When one and all
The wistful seeking senses are fulfilled
With strange austere delight, . . .
Then may the senses fall
Vanquished indeed, nor dread
That this their dear defeat be counted sin,
For every door of flesh shall lift its head
Because the King of Life is entered in.

EVELYN UNDERHILL.

SYNOPSIS

Contemplation as a means to the knowledge of God—Contemplation an *askesis*—Zeb-un-Nissa on the discipline of Love. I. INTROVERSION—Not to be confounded with introspection—"the fountain in the heart"—Father Faber, Maeterlinck, and William Law on Introversion—Introversion as a way to self-knowledge—The doctrine of the Christ within as a source of penitence and humility—Self-knowledge not merely a knowledge of sin—Much of our theology really a pathology—The discovery that we can do all things through Christ—The eschatological element in such self-knowledge—Christ known in the heart—Meditation as a preliminary step. II. MYSTIC QUIET—Not to be identified with quietism—Father Augustine Baker on active stillness—The passive element in mystic quiet—the art of "listening"—The practice of corporate silence as recorded in *The Fellowship of Silence*—Such experiments in a line with mystical tradition—Passivity not the end of mystic quiet—Ruysbroeck on the passionate "encounter" of Love—Mystical experience, active and passionate. III. CONTEMPLATION in the specific sense: Ecstasy; rapture—The brevity of vision—St. Augustine on the moment of vision—The influence of visionary moments upon his life and work—Flashes of vision not peculiar to mystics—The price of vision—Coventry Patmore on its peculiar perils—Obedience the safeguard.

CHAPTER V

SOME ELEMENTS OF THE CONTEMPLATIVE LIFE

Dr. Rendel Harris remarks somewhere that in these days there are many who know God a little, but very few who know Him much; and no one who looks at his day and generation with sober eyes can doubt that this is true. The world is perishing for lack of that dynamic and experimental knowledge of God which is the crown and glory of the saints. We have many whose morality is touched with emotion, who are keenly sensitive to spiritual suggestions and have a quick insight into religious questions, but few who are pre-eminent for an authentic, first-hand, intimately personal knowledge of God which shapes their lives and sets its indelible seal upon their souls—few, even, whose deep and settled purpose it is thus to know God. Yet, after long silence, the mystic's voice is once more heard calling us to contemplation as a means of knowing God with the understanding of love, and here and there his call meets with a response, if only in the wistful curiosity which asks, "Tell me wherein thy strength lieth? Tell me what this unfamiliar thing—contemplation—really means?" The answer is simple enough. In its essence contemplation is nothing else than a humble, steadfast, brooding attentiveness to the things of eternity in the solitude of our own souls. It means a

concentration of attention, an absorption such as that of the true artist in his subject, which can only be learnt by slow degrees, but is, nevertheless, the natural attitude of a spiritual being. It involves the extrusion of all alien interests, the gathering of scattered thoughts, the folding-in of vagrant imaginings—in short, that attitude of soul which finds its appropriate symbol in the story of the disciples assembling in the upper room and "closing the door for fear of the Jews." It is not a mood, or a state of feeling, but a discipline, an *askesis;* and our just and wholesome suspicion of the elaborate exercises whereby "New Thought" experts and the promoters of other pseudo-mystical cults profess to train ambitious aspirants to become "adepts of eternity" must not be made an excuse for casting all discipline on the scrap-heap and ruling the ascetic element out of our spiritual life. That we have practically no modern ascetic literature is taken by some as the hall-mark of spiritual liberty; in reality it is the sign of a petty and shallow temper which imagines that the Eternal and Holy One may be apprehended by every casual seeker after spiritual sensation in his sleep, as it were. True, God dwells not necessarily with the master of *askesis*, but with him that is of a contrite and humble spirit; yet, neither contrition nor humility can come to their right growth without persistent discipline. Discipline and freedom are inseparably conjoined in both art and life. It is the fashion in these days to represent the ordinary pious soul as a mechanic in bondage to rules and regulations, and the mystic as a free creative

artist of the Spirit. Let the figure stand. The eye of the artist is the *disciplined* eye; the boldest, most untrammelled vision that ever broke upon his soul depends upon the severely trained hand for its expression. And the discipline is none the less austere because it is the discipline of love. We say that the mystic soul looks out upon its world, not with the cold look of observation, which is the manner of the scientist, but with the ardent look of love, which is the way of the artist. But is the discipline of love less relentless than the discipline of science? Does the devoted servant of an impersonal idea suffer one half of the rigour, the sternness, the purifying flame which love imposes upon her apprentices? Certainly there is no formal and stereotyped method in the school of love, and we do well to distrust any cut-and-dried system, any rigid formula or elaborately sub-divided scheme which may be offered to us in the name of Mysticism. But just because it is not formal, it is the more exacting. Many of the Oriental mystics, for all their tendency to luxuriate in religious eroticism, knew love's long, unremitting discipline, her stern demand of spiritual poverty, chastity and obedience, as we, who boast of having purged ourselves of their crass anthropomorphism, do not. Thus the Indian poet, Princess Zeb-un-Nissa sings:

> "O Love, where dost Thou lead,
> Upon what travel fares our caravan?
> By Hedjaz desert shall thy footsteps speed,
> The longest journey since the world began." [1]

[1] *The Diwan of Zeb-un-Nissa*, p. 80.

And again, more explicitly:

> "Treading Love's path so long,
> Under such heavy burdens did I bow,
> At last my chastened heart has grown so strong
> No task, no pain, can bend my spirit now." [1]

That love is not only an inspiration but also a discipline holds nowhere more true than in the soul's communion with God; and the fundamental reason why we know God so little is that we are too volatile and impressionist to submit to the long, searching process of *practising* the presence of God. To attend to God is a lost art. We lack the requisite patience. St. Gregory Nazianzen's *Solius Dei impatientes sumus* is poignantly true of our day.

I

What is involved in the contemplative discipline of the mystics?

First, *Introversion*, which must not be confounded with introspection. Introspection is the attitude of the spiritual egotist, who examines his soul periodically to "see how it is getting on." It is, in the last resort, not an inward activity at all, but an attempt to observe one's soul from the outside—a holding up of the mirror to oneself, which simulates humility, but in reality only ministers to pride. Introversion, on the contrary, is a turning inwards, from the circumference to the centre, in order to hold converse, not with oneself, but with the Word, the Spirit, the indwelling Christ, call it what we will, speaking in

[1] *The Diwan of Zeb-un-Nissa*, p. 47.

the deep places of the soul, purging it from its stains and unreality and guiding it into paths of wisdom, peace and love. The "deep door" does not lead into a palace of mirrors, but into that upper room where Christ reveals Himself to His disciples. Introversion must, therefore, never be contrasted with that outgoing of the soul towards God of which it is but "the other side." It is, in fact, that coming to oneself which alone makes possible the cry, "I will arise and go to my Father."

The mystics, then, call us to introversion, declaring with one voice, "Better the fountain in the heart than the fountain by the way." We do not readily believe that. We live in a land full of fountains. Scarcely have we left one wayside well behind when another offers its sparkling draught to our eager lips. Life has expanded and grown rich beyond measure, and with it there has come to us a sharpening of sensibility, an eagerness of appreciation. Our hands are full to overflowing, and still there remains so much we should like to grasp. We tend to live more and more outside ourselves; even our concern in spiritual things often resolves itself into the interest of an intelligent onlooker anxious to study the varieties of religious experience. Thus it comes about that of all the undiscovered continents which lie about us none seems more forbidding to our relaxed taste than our own heart. Frederick W. Faber reminds us that a man needs to keep his heart warm by living in it, and it is for want of being lived in that our hearts seem to us arctic regions for which we are loath to exchange the genial sunshine of our busy and

interesting external life. Occasional excursions into the fringes of the unexplored breed in us a nameless discomfort, a ghostly fear; and we haste us back to a more friendly and familiar landscape. And so we go on, until one day some "act of God" shatters our dream-world and we awake to the fact that nothing really matters except that strange, mysterious life behind the brain in which man touches God. Such a revolution may come through the sudden explosion of a hidden mine in the heart, through the terrifying emergence of unsuspected furies, undreamed-of passions. It may come as a revelation of spiritual bankruptcy, or as a discovery of untapped sources of spiritual wealth. Some sudden and complete *bouleversement*, outward or inward, cuts the ground from under our feet, and we turn to our neglected hearts, to realise with pain that we are not at home in our own house, that we have lost the key to our true kingdom.

But the mystics remind us that we need not awake to so bleak and desolate a dawn. "Had your eyes been open," asks Maeterlinck, "might you not have beheld in a kiss that which to-day you perceive in a catastrophe?"[1] "Your heart is your life," says William Law. "Thou art a stranger to this principle of Heaven, this riches of eternity within thee. . . . Heaven is once more brought to us as a treasure hidden in the centre of our souls."[2] And again, speaking of the Church within the soul, "Accustom thyself to the holy service of the inward

[1] *The Treasure of the Humble*, p. 175.
[2] *The Spirit of Prayer* (Works, vol. vii.), pp. 29, 30.

temple. In the midst of it is the fountain of living water. . . . There the Mysteries of thy redemption are celebrated. . . . There the Supper of the Lamb is kept, the Bread that came down from Heaven that giveth light to the world is thy true nourishment. . . . When once thou art grounded in this inward worship, thou wilt have learnt to live unto God above time and place." [1] And with reiterative insistence he bids us dig deep for the pearl that was never hid in any earthly field. "Awake, then, thou that sleepest, and Christ, Who from all eternity has been espoused to thy soul, shall give thee light. Begin to search and dig in thine own field for this Pearl of Eternity that lieth hidden in it; it cannot cost thee too much, nor canst thou buy it too dear, for it is *All*, and when thou hast found it, thou wilt know that all which thou hast sold or given away for it is a mere nothing, as a bubble upon the water." [2]

Plainly, this getting accustomed to the worship of the inmost temple, this digging for the hidden pearl of our hearts, is a slowly-acquired art and involves a steady and searching discipline; and the question which immediately arises in minds accustomed to easy and all-but-unconscious acquisition of treasure is whether the gain is commensurate to the effort. What shall we find in that dense and baffling jungle of passions, desires, aspirations and motives we call our heart? Two things, say the mystics: knowledge of self and knowledge of God.

[1] *The Spirit of Prayer* (Works, vol. vii.), p. 35.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 29.

Self-knowledge must always be partial and limited, and, like all partial knowledge, is a dangerous thing, unless it is acquired by gazing at something other and higher than self. We have said that introversion is not self-inspection, but the beholding of God as immanent in the soul; and we might add that vital knowledge, either of self or of God, can come in no other way. "To mount to God," says a great mystic (probably Albertus Magnus), "is to enter into one's self. For he who inwardly entereth and intimately penetrateth into himself, gets above and beyond himself and truly mounts up to God"[1] To look into one's heart with honest, humble eyes is to place oneself under the discipline and instruction of One who is greater than our heart.

This suggests the well-known mystical doctrine of "the Christ within," which will be more fully discussed in a subsequent chapter—a doctrine which has in all ages fallen under the suspicion of engendering self-deception and of weakening, if not destroying, the sense of sin. To use Mr. Chesterton's blunt charge, Jones begins by worshipping the Christ within and ends by worshipping Jones. Now this may be painfully true—of the said Jones; but there are others in the world besides him. As a matter of hard fact, the doctrine of the indwelling Christ, whatever be its dangers and perversions, has been in all ages one of the most fruitful sources of penitence and humility. For, to the true mystic, the Christ that is found in the heart is not merely a genial and indulgent Friend, but first and foremost a holy Critic

[1] *De Adhaerando Deo*, chap. vii.

and a Discerner of secrets, a wise and severe Pedagogue guiding His pupils through the valley of contrition and humble penitence into the happy ways of wisdom, peace and love. He is the Son of God who is sent to the heart as well as to the world to convict of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. He is the unsleeping witness against a sinful self, a Herod-sword in the breast, slaying a thousand cherished infants of innocent-seeming desires and purposes. In the classic words of William Law, "He is in the heart as a Bruiser of thy serpent, as a Light unto thy feet . . . as an Holy Oil, to soften and overcome the fiery properties of thy nature and change them into the humble meekness of light and love." [1]

This is not the language of theology, but the tongue of love, and all who know what it is to be smitten with shame and pierced with self-abhorrence in the pure presence of the one they love will understand. And where the Beloved of the soul is God, His intimate presence is a progressive initiation into the fiery ordeal of a self-knowledge which would surely issue in despair, were not the eyes which expose and condemn the eyes of love. Yet, even so, the ordeal is terrible. Motives and considerations which we imagined to be supremely influential in our inner life are seen to be the merest conventions, while others we imagined to have no power over us are seen to dominate our very life. As we turn in upon ourselves, veil after veil of unreality is stripped from our quivering eyes and life gradually becomes a profounder, greater thing, more heavily fraught with awe and travail.

[1] *The Spirit of Prayer* (Works, vol. vii.), p. 33.

We know ourselves and walk with a deeper humility, a truer understanding, among our fellows. Censoriousness is slain, and in its stead there comes a love that longs to cover the multitude of sins. This, the mystics teach, is the beginning of the contemplative life. Without it, contemplation is an intellectual pastime, an emotional dissipation.

But a sense of sin is only the beginning of true self-knowledge. Much of our popular Christianity, especially of the Evangelical type, ends there. Much of our systematic representation of Christianity remains, even to this late day, a pathology—one might almost say a criminology—rather than a theology. Self-knowledge is still taken to be conterminous with a knowledge of sinfulness and frailty of the self. But with the great mystics self-knowledge has always included, as its crown, the recognition of all the glorious powers, the exquisite graces, the transcendent possibilities which slumber in the soul that is destined to be a new creation. Not in a far-off heaven, but here and now these powers and splendours can be assumed. Heaven and hell are born together with the human soul; but heaven, not hell, is its natural *habitat*, its victorious principle. To gaze into the shuddering depths that yawn beneath the surface of conventional well-doing and to know oneself a sinner is good; but to know that one can "do all things through Christ" is far better. If He is first discovered in the heart as the Revealer of sin, the next glance shows Him to be the great Inspirer, the unfailing Guardian of the smoking flax, the absolute Guarantor of every holy aspiration.

"Whom do you find within, O Soul, my Brother?
Whom do you find within?
I find a Friend that in secret came;
His scarred hands within,
He shields a faint flame."

And there is even more than that. The consciousness of the present possession of hitherto unguessed capacities and virtues in Christ is a prophecy of a new heaven and a new earth, of a new humanity which is, by slow degrees, being interiorly built up behind the scaffolding of the earthly life of those who live by the power of Christ working in them. We have been told *ad nauseam* that Mysticism and eschatology are irreconcilable; but while it is true that the great mystics would have little to do with the popular eschatology of their age, it is equally true that in the very heart of Mysticism, giving it a foothold upon reality, there slumbers an unrecognised eschatological principle. In the very act of realising the timeless possession of the indwelling God, the soul cries out for something that is clearly perceived and yet felt to be far off—something that is, indeed, present "now," but not "here." "I saw Him and sought Him; I had Him and I wanted Him," says Lady Julian. The very act of seeing and possessing brings with it a vision of something "to come"—not something that will suddenly descend from heaven ready-made, but an end which is seen, not merely as the tree in the acorn, but also as the goal to which the athlete bends his steps. If the mystic realises his eternal life here and now, it is because God makes the end so to shine for him in the light of His in-working

grace that, even while on earth, he sits with Christ in heavenly places. If he knows Christ in the heart as a present timeless Power, it is because He has seen Him as the Hope of Glory. The two elements—that of a present, timeless possession of eternity and of a Divine event toward which the soul moves—are the two necessary movements of Christian experience, and in Mysticism they find their complete fusion, their perfect synthesis.[1]

Introversion, then, is the first step in that great mystical discipline which is at once a purgation and an illumination, a bringing into captivity and a liberation, a *praxis* and a *gnosis*. The mystics have ever found that a turning in upon the hidden man of the heart does not merely issue in a humble and chastened temper, but also in a fructifying of thought, a quickening of joy. In the deep, quiet places of the heart Jesus Himself draws near and, walking with His own, expounds to them, in all the Scriptures, the things concerning Himself. It is there that the soul becomes not only familiar with herself, but colloquial with Christ. There His most delicate and intimate approaches are discerned, His lightest touch felt ; there Love exercises its most constraining power and Grace achieves its most glorious triumphs. There the mystery of the Cross, so often profaned by the glib theorisings of popular theology, is "inspoken" in all its mortifying and vivifying power. And thus he who has the courage, the patience, and the humility to turn in upon himself feels a fountain

[1] For a more detailed discussion, see Chapter XI., "Mysticism and Eschatology."

opened in his heart which is better far than any fountain that ever sprang up by the way.

That such introversion is not an easy thing, that it involves a habit of recollection, concentration, and attention against which flesh and spirit alike rebel is known to all who have tried to attain to it. Christian mystics have always sought to acquire it by way of meditation on some aspect of God's being or of man's redemption, some article of faith, some verse or incident of Scripture. Meditation, however, while it may be described as the preliminary step in the contemplative life, is not the exclusive property of the mystical type. It is essential to all Christian life, and the great reason why the Bible has lost its hold upon the average *religious* person (as distinct from the "man in the street") is to be sought in the impatience and lack of self-control which have made meditation a lost art. A great book yields its true spirit, its interior sweetness, only to long and patient brooding; and no amount of modern Bible study, however intelligent and up-to-date, can take the place of that slow, deep pondering which at one time was the joy of every pious farm labourer who could, by any means, spell out the sacred page.

II

It is not our object to trace the various steps of contemplation or to expound its psychology. Those who wish to read a popular but competent psychological study of the subject can do no better than to

consult Miss Underhill's attractive account.[1] For our purpose it is sufficient to note that introversion begets a great stillness in the soul, which is technically termed *Quiet*, or the *Orison of Quiet*. This, as Miss Underhill justly remarks, is "the danger zone of introversion," for nothing is easier than for the fruitful stillness of Mysticism to pass into the sterile impassivity of Quietism, which Ruysbroeck, as we have seen, does not hesitate to call treason towards God. Yet no mistake could be more fatal than to reject mystic Quiet as a doubtful and dangerous element. It is not only an integral part of mystical religion; it is the necessary condition of God's deep self-communication to the soul. "Be still and know" is the great rule of the mystic life.

That such stillness is not idleness but action has been pointed out again and again by the great mystics. It is that "busy rest" in which the soul abandons all superficial activity for the supreme act of stretching towards God. It is not a vacancy, but a great drawing-in of wisdom and energy. Father Augustine Baker, in a metaphor of thrilling effect, describes it as the soaring of an eagle in mid-air which, for a good space, can cleave its way through the blue "with a great swiftness but withal with great stillness, quietness and ease, without any waving of the wings at all or the least force used in any member, being in as much ease and stillness as if she were reposing in her nest."[2] It is, in fact, the rest that is born of triumphant and all-effective energy. With these interpretations of it

[1] *Mysticism*, Part II., chaps. vi., vii. and viii.
[2] *Holy Wisdom*, Treatise III., § iii., chap. vii.

the modern mind finds itself in full sympathy. It can well understand a state of intense receptivity in which every pore of the soul is open to receive impressions, in which the mind stretches out a thousand prehensile tentacles of inquiry and appreciation. The soul on tip-toe, waiting in a tense rigour of expectancy to know, to feel, to experience, to taste as much of life as its quivering palate can assimilate—such a conception is essentially modern and makes a strong appeal to a generation which delights in giving itself up to the impressions of each moment.

But while all this is true, it is not wholly in this way that God gives Himself to the soul. There is also a negative element in mystic Quiet. The soul that would hold the Divine Word as the shell holds the ocean must be empty, not only of vagrant thoughts and superficial interests, but of its own darting inclination towards whatever seems to it Divine. It must no longer go out to seek; it must wait. This passivity does not nullify the more active stretching towards God. Both have a place in the spiritual life; but in the Orison of Quiet it is the passive and not the active side that (though the latter is present also) gives its character to the whole. Passivity is an essential element, not only in all genuine religion, but also in all great art and all true science. It is the wisdom of the scientist to empty his mind of all theories and speculations and surrender himself humbly to Nature, as it is the prudence of the saints to be still that God may speak.

Passivity is not a gymnastic exercise for spiritual cranks—part of the ritual of those who deem them-

selves hierophants of an esoteric tradition: it is a fundamental law of spiritual health. If we really believe that eternity is ever murmuring upon the horizon, that the still, small voice never ceases to whisper in all the myriad ways of life, that the spiritual world knocks every moment upon the gates of sense, then our only wisdom is to be still and listen. We read such mystical rhymes as—

> "Once in a silent night a Child was born,
> Who brought again what once was lost and torn.
> Could but thy soul, O man, become a silent night,
> Christ would be born in thee and set all things aright,"

or,

> "Would you look in Paradise,
> It must be with closèd eyes.
> Would you hear the singing spheres,
> Lie and list with closèd ears"—

and we dismiss them as quaint mediæval conceits. But a deeper consciousness tells us that they are the naked truth; that we have missed that Holy Thing which waited to be born in us because we have preferred the pride of inutile noise to the humility of fruitful silence; because we could never honestly say, "Speak, Lord, *for Thy servant heareth.*" It is here that the message of mystic Quiet lies for a garrulous and facile generation.

Speaking generally, the practice of mystic Quiet is individual and solitary, though corporate silence was never excluded from the practice of the great mystics. At the present day, however, a new conception and psychology of "togetherness," which naturally found its first expression in that form of

corporate prayer known as " guided supplication and intercession," and then led, here and there, to the practice of corporate thinking, has produced a remarkable movement towards fellowship in silence. The silence contemplated is not, strictly speaking, the mystic Quiet, but rather the " quiet meeting " of the Society of Friends extended and modified to suit the requirements of members of other Churches or religious bodies who wish to unite in silent waiting upon God. In a recent book, *The Fellowship of Silence*, two members of the Society of Friends and three Anglican clergymen record their experiences " in the common use of prayer without words." Their testimony is based upon actual experiments, the first of which was made in a New Zealand village, where Anglicans, Quakers, and Theosophists met together in an Anglican church for the corporate silent practice of the Presence of God. Week by week this strangely-composed company met and remained for a space in " an attitude of still waiting upon God with all the faculties of the soul alert if it might be that God would speak to His children." They were not mystics, or even experts in the habit of silent waiting, yet they found no difficulty in practising what is admittedly a most difficult spiritual art, for the simple reason that they did it in fellowship with others and drew from that association a power that is denied to the isolated soul. The record of these experiments is a valuable human document, and, while not mystical in the technical sense of the word, forms a significant addition to our very scanty present-day literature of concrete first-

hand spiritual experience. Much in the book must be left to "lie on the table"; much may fairly be questioned by mystics and non-mystics alike. What concerns us here is the fact that bodies of ordinary Christian believers, with no pretence to high spiritual attainments, are meeting here and there in the fellowship of silence, and that both the spirit and the method of these meetings are in essence that of the great mystics. To read, for instance, the editor's account of silent meetings under Anglican auspices, is to read a page from the mystics translated into terms of present-day religious usage.

There are, generally speaking, four stages in this form of the fellowship of silence. The first is a brief space for preliminary recollection, the common recital of the Lord's Prayer, and a simple act of confession. Of the second stage—that "stilling of the mind and soul" upon which the mystics lay such stress—the editor, the Rev. Cyril Hepher, says, "The very activity of the brain may make a man a bad listener, and listening was our goal. The intellect needs to learn how to be still no less than the body, if it is to concentrate all its powers upon the work of hearing. . . . There are two things which are practically of service. First, the recollection of God under some aspect of His boundless immensity . . . His awful sanctity, His enfolding Being. . . . Here, too, it is useful to have in mind some quick word of recall, by which the wandering of thought can be instantly . . . brought back to the central purpose. The word 'God,' not spoken but sounding in the mind, the holy name of

Jesus, or 'Deus, Deus Meus,' form such words of recall. This preparation may take long. . . . It is worth persisting in till it has gained its end, till mind and soul are silent unto God." [1]

The next stage is that of "listening." "We pass thus," says Mr. Hepher, "to the centre of our silence. The will is at its highest activity. As an insect poised in the air, seemingly motionless, with wings in such rapid motion that they are invisible, is all the while sustained by its resistance to the air, so the will in this listening is not passive. . . . This is very far from making the mind a blank. It is the filling of the mind with God to the exclusion of all else. Here our silence differed most profoundly from intellectual meditation. We were not seeking to think new thoughts, only to hear them. We rested on the belief that God is in His very essence THE WORD. His will is to speak, to reveal, and He has created man to hear and understand. . . . Not in words, nor visions, nor signs did we look for the communications of God. Thoughts rising spontaneously, movements and stirrings welling up from the depths of the soul, the inner glory of God hidden in the soul of man, emerging, filling the Temple, none of these word-images convey what cannot be conveyed. Only we knew God, and we knew that we knew Him. If this sound too bold a claim to make, my excuse must be that to say less would be to belittle the generosity of God." [2]

[1] *The Fellowship of Silence*, pp. 128, 129.
[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 130, 131.

There is a final stage which Mr. Hepher defines as the active outpouring of the soul's devotion before the throne of God. "God has revealed Himself in the silence and we must not be disobedient to the heavenly vision. Aspiration and longing are now focussed into the resolution of the will. With all its powers awake the soul surrenders itself without reserve into the hands of God. The prayer of the affections blends with the prayer of the will. Now, again, out of the depths of the Divine Being that we have been contemplating, we draw for our need, or for the necessities of those for whom we desire to intercede. . . . Human need and its divine supply meet in the soul which has passed rightly through the 'stilling' and the 'listening.' Here is a defence against spiritual self-centredness or selfishness." [1]

Here we have a striking example of that *præparatio mystica* which is going on at present quietly and steadily, often in quarters which few would connect with distinctly mystical aspirations. The quotations are given at length because they illustrate so perfectly the influential and practical nature of the great basal principles of Mysticism. A group of people here and there meet in all simplicity to sit together and hear what God will say unto them, and, without knowing it, they discover for themselves the great mystic wells of silence, recollection, introversion, orison, purgation, illumination, and union. They discover with the great mystics the inspiring and fructifying power of silence and its tremendous dynamic. Their experiments convey a much-needed

[1] *The Fellowship of Silence*, pp. 133, 134.

lesson to the aspirant after mystical experience. At the root of our incapacity for true introversion, quiet, and contemplation there lies our all-but-incurable fear of simple silence, whether with our fellows or with God. In many cases it is not the absence of what we call mystical affinities which hinder our claiming our high spiritual birthright of direct and intimate knowledge of God; it is simply that we lack the courage to pass into that deep silence where His voice is heard, where alone He can be known. To not a few the revival of Retreats has been the means of revealing the blessings and potentialities of silence, its constraining and inspiring force, its searching and regenerating function. "Those who have never tried the experience," rightly observes Mr. Hepher, "will speak of this silence as artificial or unnatural. It is the endless chatter of needless talk that strikes the man who has just come from Retreat as artificial and unnatural." But the majority shrink from the experience. Silence reveals the soul that is in them, and they are not at home with their soul. Silence is the hand of God besetting them behind and before, and they cannot endure that touch of the spiritual life, and here also Voltaire's blunt observation holds true—"It is the misfortune of most good men that they are cowards." Our desire for God lacks the virile force that could cope with this constitutional timidity. It is too feeble to make an adventure upon its object. "If it be indeed your desire," says Maeterlinck, "to give yourself over to another, be silent. . . . Some there are that have no silence, and that kill the silence around them,

and these are the only creatures that pass through life unperceived. To them it is not given to cross the zone of revelation, the great zone of firm and faithful light. We cannot conceive what sort of man is he who has never been silent. It is to us as though his soul were featureless. 'We do not know each other yet,' wrote to me one whom I hold dear above all others; 'we have not yet dared to be silent together.'" [1] And we of to-day know God so little because we do not dare to be silent with Him.

But while passivity is the characteristic element in mystic Quiet, it is characteristic only because it is the condition of something other than itself. This, indeed, is true of the whole act of mystic Introversion and Orison. While it should never be used as certain occultists use it, as a deliberate means to the attainment of "supernatural" intimations and powers, it is essentially a *listening*, and the act of listening is incomplete where no voice is heard and the soul remains empty and disappointed. The great mystics have found the classic symbol of receptive stillness of soul in the story of the Annunciation, where the Virgin Mary receives the angelic salutation with the grave simplicity and humble surrender of a soul emptied of itself and presenting no obstacle to the incoming of God. But if Mary was emptied of self it was only that she might become "full of grace," for true emptiness of self is but

> "the female twin
> Of Fulness, sucking all God's glory in."

[1] *The Treasure of the Humble*, pp. 13, 14.

When Mary spoke her *fiat* of submission, then it was divined in Heaven, though the word had not been spoken on earth, that "Whosoever doeth the will of God, the same is . . . My Mother." But what does this mean for us? Mystical theology answers that it means the incoming of a force, a life, which pierces while it charms, and hides a long, sharp agony in its first sweet inrush of joy. At last the little human heart, so full to bursting with its own selfhood, so madly preoccupied with its baubles, so greedy of ease and comfort, is purged of its idols and disciplined to a great silence. It waits, and it has not long to wait; for "Thy opening and His entering are but one moment, and to wait until thou openest is harder for Him than for thee." But how terrible and tumultuous His coming may be! How acute may be the pain of an incursion in which every door of flesh and spirit is wrenched out of its socket that the King of Glory may come in! Ruysbroeck has much to say about this aspect of God's response to man's welcome. Writing of the eternal Love coming to the soul, he says: "Love gives more than we are able to receive, and exacts more than we are able to give. Its requirements are like a devouring fire: the body shares the impatience of the soul; the spirit burns with a consuming eagerness. This panting avidity recollects the spirit in the simple peace of the deep. The Spirit comes into contact with our spirit and says to it in the depth: 'Love Me as I love thee—as I have loved thee eternally.' Now this voice, this prayer, this interior demand, is so terrible to hear that our spirit is utterly overthrown by the

tempest of love; and all the powers of the soul, shaken and trembling, turn to each other asking, 'Do we indeed love the eternal Love—the Love inexhaustible?'"[1] With the mystics, self-emptying and silencing of soul always result in the incoming of a life which is at once a fulness and a want, a gift and a demand, a satisfying peace and a devouring passion. Even where the Divine comes to man, as the Holy Child came to Mary, in the guise of simple tenderness and homely joy, so that the heart is filled with a sweet delight and yields itself gladly to the charm and enchantment of Divine grace, an edge of pain, a sharpness as of coming woe, is dimly felt. Even in these gentle encounters of the soul with God terror mingles strangely with loveliness. Deep secrets have been told, a new, strange life is pulsing where only the life of nature was before. Never again can the soul look out upon the world with the old placid contentment; never again can she hug the green shores of sensuous existence and turn her back upon the great deeps of eternal life. Her ears are filled with the sound of many waters, her eyes are fixed on One Whom to possess is to desire ever more ardently.

III

Speaking broadly, then—for there is, of course, no such thing as a stereotyped spiritual process—it may be said that mystic Quiet is the source of that spiritual passion of whose fires are born Contemplation proper, Ecstasy and Rapture. Contemplation may briefly be defined as an immediate conscious-

[1] *Reflections from the Mirror of a Mystic*, p. 82.

ness of God; Ecstasy is an involuntary state of being caught up to God, and if instead of coming at the end of a period of introversion it seizes the soul suddenly, it is termed Rapture. The two forms of involuntary absorption need not concern us here, but students will do well to note that however weird and morbid these states often appear, it is a matter of historical fact that in all genuine ecstatics these trance states, so far from weakening their mental and moral fibre, ministered directly to the effectiveness of their life and thought, and even, in many cases, to their physical well-being. Here, as in the case of all psychic states, we must be careful to distinguish between the morbid and the healthy, the test always being their ultimate effect upon the intellectual and moral calibre of the subject. With contemplation in the specific sense we have a somewhat closer concern. It is a brief experience—"a flash," "an instant," "the space of an *Ave Maria*," say the mystics. It is essentially the instant made eternity—a winged experience of disconcerting fleetness, yet never to be lost. It is a single blinding flash of brilliance, but the eye that has been smitten by it retains its light for ever. "My mind," says St. Augustine, "withdrew its thoughts from experience, extracting itself from the contradictory throng of sensuous images, that it might find out what that Light was wherein it was bathed. . . . And thus, with the flash of one hurried glance, it attained to the vision of *That which Is*. And then, at last, I saw Thy invisible things understood by means of the things that are made, but I could not

sustain my gaze : my weakness was dashed back, and I was relegated to my ordinary experience, bearing with me only a loving memory, and, as it were, the fragrance of those desirable meats on the which as yet I was not able to feed." [1]

St. Augustine was somewhat distrustful of these fugitive glimpses into the Eternal, and decidedly sceptical of the utility or advisability of seeking to attain to them. His preponderantly metaphysical genius precluded the *naïveté* which belongs to those who see and know not what it is to doubt their vision. Yet his moments of vision were the influential moments of his life, and as we work our way through the difficult and intricate development of his doctrinal convictions with, perhaps, a growing antagonism to his later views, we realise that it was not by his theology, whether earlier or later, that he lived, but by those flashes of spiritual insight by which, for a few fleeting moments, he beheld the Face of God. To assert this is something other than to say, as is often done, that while Augustine wrote many influential books, he wrote only one immortal work, the *Confessions*. This is, however, not quite true ; for while the *Confessions* is the only one of his writings which belongs to the literature of the soul, whole ages have been shaped by his strictly theological works, and if every word of them perished they would still live on in institutions, and systems, and countless great minds which have been influenced by them. Even the thinker who deliberately sets himself to demolish the Augustinian edifice must forge

[1] *Confessions*, book vii., chap. xvii.

his weapons of destruction from the stuff of certain great intuitions and convictions which first became articulate and fruitful in the mind of St. Augustine. But what is true and what we are concerned with is that the elements in all of St. Augustine's writings which authenticate themselves most infallibly to the Christian consciousness were born of these rare experiences, when for one brief and almost delirious moment he was caught up to God before being dragged back once more by his own weight.

This experience of a sudden, brief, direct realisation of the Eternal, while essentially mystical, is not confined to Mysticism—is, indeed, not confined to the realm of religion. The most ordinary and unspiritual life bears testimony to the revolutionary and permanent influence of some passing flash of insight, some sudden realisation of hidden powers. And when we come to the sphere of religion we find so unimaginative and decidedly legalistic a soul as President Finney suddenly plunged into an experience such as might have overwhelmed the flaming heart of St. Teresa. Minds of the most widely varying type and training, temperaments of the most diametrically opposite quality, have been re-made by such brief flashes of spiritual lucidity, when the soul sees and "endures" God. This means that while not all have a specifically mystical endowment and can place themselves under a characteristically mystical discipline, one element at least of the higher mystical experience is common to all passionately apprehending souls.

And if this is rarer than some enthusiasts will admit,

it is not so much because few are temperamentally qualified for it, as because few will submit to the discipline and pay the price of such an experience. The soul instinctively knows that God cannot be loved with impunity. Vision is an extortionate trafficker. Not content with demanding a price in advance, she exacts almost as heavy a price at the end. A moment of insight has to be paid for by months—years, maybe—of spiritual aridity. A glimpse of celestial light makes the shadows of earth more oppressive and solid than ever before. A vision of holiness lends its sharpest sting to temptation, and a soul in love with purity must needs offer a vulnerable heel to the crawler in the dust. So fearfully and wonderfully are we made that our frail spirits are for ever touching heights which they are incompetent to keep, and for which the thwarted flesh plots to take terrible revenge. Let us not be mistaken. There is that in Mysticism and in the whole mystical aspect of religion which may well inspire the sober-minded with wholesome fear. To discern its moral peril is not the narrowness of the religious *bourgeoisie*, it is common ethical prudence. The contemplative soul stands on that haunted frontier line between sense and spirit which is the devil's own hunting ground. On the one hand, we see it on the mount of God, ringed about with Heaven —the proudest and the humblest of all created things. It plucks stars where we gather filthy lucre. It sees God where we stare greedily at the gargoyles of sense. It keeps step to the music of angels while we dance to the world's piping. But, on the other

hand, we see it surrounded by perils, stalked by fiends. We know that the fisher in the waters of the Spirit may have his net so full that he cannot draw it to land without the risk of being dragged into the deep; that it is all but impossible to bear a full cup unspilled across a swaying bridge, to carry a white bird unsoiled through the grimy market place.

Of the many perils and temptations which attach to the act of Contemplation and the gift of vision mystical literature has much to say. The most elementary of these is the temptation to impatience. "If the Lord tarry, wait for Him" is the first law of contemplation, and Coventry Patmore observes shrewdly that "the impatience of the soul for vision is one of the last faults that can be cured. Only to those who watch and wait with absolute indifference as to the season of revelation do all things reveal themselves." [1] This impatience is guarded against by the controlling objective of Mysticism, which is not knowledge or power, but Love. Love can wait and serve seven years for his beloved and count them but a day. A more tragic temptation is that of allowing the bliss of vision to reconcile the heart to an imperfect obedience. Here again Coventry Patmore is the best modern interpreter: "The occasional exaltation of the faculty of intellectual perception to heights far above the present ability of the moral nature to follow is a fact of every man's experience. . . . The visits of angels to them are few and far between, but they are always frequent

[1] *The Rod, the Root, and the Flower: "Aurea Dicta,"* CXI.

and bright enough to fix themselves for ever in the memory, and to take away all excuse on the plea of ignorance for not striving for true life; and their more frequent occurrence would constitute an immense peril, as we see in the examples of many of these persons who are called 'men of genius.' . . . They not only . . . join evil with a present and perceptive knowledge of good; nay they often . . . look on the bared splendours of Purity with eyes of the untransfigured passions." [1] Yet another peril is found in the delusion of taking the seeing of visions for the possession of their Reality. This is the tragedy of many mystics—to imagine they are what they only see. "Long," says Coventry Patmore, "I mistook seeing the end for being in the way." It is here that Mysticism parts company with poetry, art, and all romantic experiences and movements. Whatever be true of the poet and the artist, it is the mystic's vocation not merely to behold the Face of God, but so to behold it *in righteousness* that he may be satisfied when he awakes with His likeness.

And here again it is not so much upon the act of seeing as upon *the Thing seen* that the whole matter hangs. There are visions which affect the soul as poppy seed—visions which are allied to sleep, poison, and eternal night. There are visions of Divine Love which lack the steel fibre of righteousness, and so relax and delude. There are visions of a glory without shame, of a crown without a cross, which exalt the soul to the brow of the hill, only to cast her down and

[1] *The Rod, the Root, and the Flower*: "*Magna Moralia*," XX.

dash her against the stones. But what if the soul's vision be a call to service, and its very radiance secure that

> "Tasks in hours of insight willed
> Shall be in hours of gloom fulfilled"?

What if it smite the soul with pity for a whole travailing creation? What if its touch of fire thrust it forth into an apostolate of world-wide scope? What if it be a vision of the Crucified Redeemer? To close one's eyes because there is peril in keeping them open is sheer insanity. If there is danger in vision, is there less danger in refusing to see? But the true mystic has always remembered that not all visions are from above, and that the fleeting moment of contemplative vision is not only a fulfilment but a challenge, not only an answer but a question. Baptismal moments are always followed by a temptation in the wilderness; the unveiling of beauty always involves a stern ethical choice. Upon the seer rests the special obligation to be obedient to the heavenly vision, and obedience is not a natural instinct; it is a matter of long training, of continuous moral discipline. The two alternatives which front the mystic as he comes down from the mount of contemplation have been characteristically expressed by a recent poet:[1]

> "Thou canst choose the Eastern Circle for thy part,
> And within its sacred precincts thou shalt rest;
> Thou shalt fold pale, slender hands upon thy breast,
> Thou shalt fasten silent eyes upon thy heart.

[1] Ruth Temple Lindsay.

If there steal within the languor of thine ark
The thunder of the waters of the earth,
The human, simple cries of pain and mirth,
The wails of little children in the dark,
Thou shalt contemplate thy Circle's radiant gleam,
Thou shalt gather self and God more closely still:
Let the piteous and the foolish moan at will,
So thou shelter in the sweetness of thy dream.

"Thou canst bear a blood-stained Cross upon thy breast,
Thou shalt stand upon the common, human sod,
Thou shalt lift unswerving eyes unto thy God,
Thou shalt stretch torn, rugged hands to east and west.
Thou shalt call to every throne and every cell—
Thou shalt gather all the answers of the earth,
Thou shalt wring repose from weariness and dearth,
Thou shalt fathom the profundity of hell—
But thy height shalt touch the height of God above,
And thy breadth shall span the breadth of pole to pole,
And thy depth shall sound the depth of every soul,
And thy heart the deep Gethsemane of Love."

CHAPTER VI

A TYPICAL MYSTIC: BLESSED ANGELA DE FOLIGNO

only sought for the Heart of God, therein to hide myself.

JACOB BOEHME.

That remarkable personality, the Blessed Angela of Foligno, who was converted from a life of worldliness to become not only a Christian and a Franciscan, but also a Platonist. In her account of her "dark" contemplation of the Divine we seem to hear the voice of Plotinus speaking from the Vale of Spoleto.

EVELYN UNDERHILL.

SYNOPSIS

A typical mystic, one who exhibits the defects as well as the virtues of his type. I. The Life of Blessed Angela—Her conversion—Her initial weakness—Her early spiritual selfishness replaced by a spirit of redemptive love. II. Her development as recorded in her writings—Her first vision of Christ—Its dynamic force and humbling effect—Her conversion to a Franciscan love of Nature—Her conviction of sin the measure of her love—The superstitious and spurious elements in her visions—Her evangelical quality—Mr. Algar Thorold on her *Book of Visions*—Her capacity for self-observation and analysis—Her surrender to the stern discipline of love—She is denied a "sign"—Her joyful surrender to heroic demands—Her persistent self-criticism. III. Her swan song of Love—Her "Last Testament" to her children—Her final vision—Her influence upon Ubertino de Casale. IV. Her claim to be considered a typical mystic: (1) Her development is natural and not forced into the mould of any "mystic way"; (2) Her combination of mystical and institutional elements; (3) Her m ngling of high contemplation and deep humility, of exaltation and mortification; (4) Her perfect exemplification of "love expressing itself in joy"; (5) Her sanity and balance of the heroic and the submissive, the active and the passive, the austere and the tender.

CHAPTER VI

A TYPICAL MYSTIC: BLESSED ANGELA DE FOLIGNO[1]

In most treatises on Mysticism the "typical" mystic is chosen for his spiritual genius or his conspicuous sanity, with the unmistakable purpose of convincing the reader that the great mystics are not made of "carpet slippers and weak tea," that they are immune from the superstitions of their age, and that they live on something stronger and saner than locutions, visions, and such like psychical phenomena. The result is not infrequently that the critical reader, especially if he have some knowledge of mystics other than the pattern submitted for his approval, will be irritated at the manifest "tendency" of the choice and, moreover, have a shrewd suspicion that to prove the mystics free from the weaknesses which accompany their spiritual type is to prove altogether too much.

We shall therefore take as our "typical" mystic not the sane and passionate, practical, and contemplative St. Teresa, or the high-soaring and lowly-hearted Ruysbroeck, or the romantic "Minnesinger of God," Richard Rolle, or that most typically English of mystics, Walter Hilton, whose sweet, sane, hospitable spirit makes him the favourite example

[1] The quotations are taken throughout from the English translation of the *Visionum et Instructionum Liber*, published under the title of *The Book of the Divine Consolation.*

with English writers on Mysticism. All these not only exhibit spiritual genius of a high order (in the case of the first two, of the very highest order), but are also remarkably free from the defects of their qualities. We shall rather look for one who does possess in some degree, though not, of course, sufficiently to invalidate his positive contribution, the defects of his type, and who, while he may not reach the dry and virile sanity of St. John of the Cross, retains the humanity which the stern Carmelite counted a world well lost. Such a one is found in Blessed Angela de Foligno, and it is not without intention that we select an essentially feminine mystic—one who entirely lacks the characteristic "virility" of St. Teresa or St. Catherine of Siena.

I

Of the life of Blessed Angela we know comparatively little, and what we know corresponds externally with the life and development of the average mediæval woman "saint." She was born in 1248, and, in contrast to most mystics, her childhood was unclouded by premature seriousness. For her no whisper of eternity upon the horizon to strike trouble to her childish heart, no dim foreboding to chill her blind eagerness on the threshold of an early marriage, no warning voice to thunder in her ears, when, after marriage, a treacherous world cried to her to come and take her fill of love and joy while youth was still hers. Without a trace of mystic intimation, without stirrings of conscience even, and, indeed,

without a thought but of the pleasures that beckoned, she ran gaily into the trap that awaited her. No young rebel of to-day, bitten with Nietzschian immoralism, could take the plunge into lawlessness more resolutely and unregrettingly than this mediæval girl, born on soil consecrated by an innumerable army of martyrs, breathing the very atmosphere of her dear " old father," St. Francis.

Her captivity to fleshly lust endured for many years, until one day fear found her unguarded soul and forced her, trembling, to go to confession—a duty she had long neglected. But finding herself in the confessional, shame overtook her, and she failed to tell her more serious sins. Torn between remorse and love of sin, she took Holy Communion, thus adding to her many transgressions the sin of sacrilege which weighs so heavily upon the Catholic conscience. In this state of " bad faith " she lived for some time, until, driven by a craven fear of hell fire, she betook herself to St. Francis, beseeching him, among many things, to guide her to a confessor to whom she could tell her worst sins without fear of being misunderstood. St. Francis gave her no definite answer, but on the day following she heard a friar preach at the Church of St. Felicien, and, feeling certain that he was the confessor whom St. Francis intended for her, she confessed her sins to him honestly and fully.

On that day she began that slow and toilsome pilgrimage which she describes with such depth and candour in her writings. She entered the family of St. Francis as a Tertiary hermit, living in retirement

with a religious companion in the neighbourhood of the Church of the Friars Minor at Foligno until her death in 1309.

Viewed superficially and externally, the life of Blessed Angela does not offer very promising material. It is the story of a wayward and frivolous young woman given over to gross indulgence, who, even when summoned by the Voice which none dare gainsay with impunity, lacked sufficient resolution and singleness of mind to make a sincere response. Shallow, emotional, afflicted with that maddening infirmity of purpose which is inherent in such natures as hers and increases a hundredfold through self-indulgence, she stood shivering on the brink of the bitter waters of repentance, wetting a reluctant foot, as it were, and withdrawing it again with coward haste. And when at last she took the plunge, it was not because her eyes were opened to the Love she had misused and grieved, or that she was stricken with shame for her insincerity, but from sheer maddening terror of hell. Such stories are of every-day occurrence in the experience of those who have to deal with weak and vacillating natures.

And even when we turn to her writings, we do not, at first sight, discover much that is relevant to our present-day quest of Reality. On the surface there is much that has a merely antiquarian and literary interest for us and not a little that repels. Some students of Mysticism, indeed, have stopped short at the repellent elements. Dean Inge,[1] for instance, dismisses her summarily as an exemplification of that

[1] *Christian Mysticism*, p. 97.

"self-centred individualism" which was the dehumanising factor in the lives of so many mediæval mystics. Others have treated her writings as a purely literary achievement, ranking with the *Golden Legend*, as one writer has it, as "our rarest literary heritage from those days." But such writing as Blessed Angela's is no mere matter of verbal music, graceful imagery, and the literary interpretation of exquisite moods and soul-shaking emotions; it is life in all its authenticity, sincerity and timeless interest—life clothed in words, not as a fair body is clothed in delicate garments, but as bone is clothed with flesh. To read with open and attentive mind is to discover a life in God which, beginning as a troubled and shallow trickle, gains little by little in breadth and depth, and we accuse our own experience of feebleness and shallowness beside the profound and pellucid intuitions of this passionate and humble soul speaking to us across the centuries in words of truth edged with beauty.

The strictly progressive character of her experience becomes clear on careful reading, and it is largely through overlooking this steadily upward trend that Dr. Inge and other writers lay such condemnatory emphasis upon her admittedly inhuman attitude towards her relations. Let her tell the story in her own words: "In that time and by God's will there died my mother, who was a great hindrance unto me in following the way of God; my husband died likewise, and in a short time there also died all my children. And because I had commenced to follow the aforesaid way, and had prayed God that He

would rid me of them, I had great consolation of their deaths, albeit I did also feel some grief." [1]

Such an attitude is, of course, frankly repellent, but it is in no sense peculiar either to Blessed Angela or to mystics in general. It represents the common mediæval conception of religious detachment, the common mediæval interpretation of Christ's "He that hateth not father and mother is not worthy of Me." All mediæval religious literature is full of appalling examples of this inhumanity, and Italian and Spanish literature more especially abounds in examples of pious heartlessness. In the case of Blessed Angela, however, this attitude was virtually though not formally repudiated as her spiritual life clarified. Thus she tells us that her vision of God's supreme justice issued in love: "There came upon me," she says, "such a fulness of charity, and with so great a joy did I understand that power, will, and justice of God, that not only was I satisfied concerning the questions I had asked, but likewise concerning all creatures, even the demons and the damned, *for I felt I was called to save them one and all.*" [2]

Here we have the direct opposite of the sentiment expressed in our first quotation—a spiritual love whose altruism does not draw the line at hell. In a later chapter she records her love for toads and serpents, and even for her enemies: "Moreover, I rejoiced greatly in praying for those who might work me these evils, . . . for not only ought we to pray unto God

[1] *The Book of the Divine Consolation*, p. 5.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 176.

for them, but we should beseech Him to grant them especial grace. Therefore was I very ready to pray for them who did me evil, to love them with a very great love, and to take compassion upon them." [1]

But perhaps the following passage taken from her "Last Admonition" to her "children" shows most strikingly how far she had travelled since the days of her spiritual selfishness: "I do exhort you that ye desire not only to have charity among yourselves, but likewise unto all people. For I say unto you that of a certainty my soul hath received more profit from weeping and lamenting over the sins of my neighbour than over mine own. . . . Oh, my children, strive to possess this charity and judge not any man, even though ye should behold him commit a mortal sin. I do not say that sin should not be displeasing to you, but I do say that ye should never judge the sinners; and, moreover, I say that ye should never despise them, for ye know the judgments of our Lord God; and many there are who do appear unto men to be condemned unto hell, but who are saved in the sight of God, and many who appear unto men to be saved are reprobate in the sight of God. . . . *I could tell you of some whom ye have despised, but of whom I have the sure hope that God* will lead them back into His own hand." [2]

II

We now proceed to a more systematic account of her spiritual development as set forth in her writings. There is perhaps nothing in all mystical literature

[1] *The Book of the Divine Consolation*, pp. 199, 200.
[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 260, 261.

—not even in the *Little Flowers* of St. Francis or the exquisite legend of St. Rose of Lima—that can compare for dewy freshness and quiet deep loveliness to Blessed Angela's walk with Christ through the Umbrian vineyards, as set forth in the first chapter of her *Book of Visions*.[1] Set free from the snare of lust, she yearns for a love that knows no evil, and thus yearning she walks the Umbrian plain between Spello and Assisi—part of the walk which Goethe described as the most beautiful he ever took—with unseeing eyes. The gradations of glorious green stretching into the dim distance, the richness of vine, olive and ornamental trees, the magic of the far hills—none of these penetrated through the absent eyes to the soul that craved what they could not give. Then suddenly, when she was come to "that place which lieth between Spello and the narrow road which leadeth upwards unto Assisi," Christ meets her and, speaking words of sweet assurance, says: "I love thee better than any other who is in the valley of Spoleto." And with the simple abandonment of a maiden who had never known sin she nestles to the very Heart of God, thrilling with joy to hear her Divine Lover comfort her loneliness, saying, "I will bear thee company, and will speak with thee all the way." So on they fare, she wistfully questioning, Christ pouring clearness and consolation into her dim and aching soul, until He departs "with great gentleness," and she is left weeping and "crying with a loud voice, clamouring and calling without any shame." "Oh Love," she cries, "heretofore I have never known Thee, why

[1] *The Book of the Divine Consolation*, pp. 160–167.

leavest Thou me in this manner ? " Yet with great comfort she went upon her way at last, speaking of God, and the new, sweet consolation abode with her.

At first sight the record of this vision seems little more than a piece of naïve and exquisite writing. It seems entirely in keeping with the writer's character that her religious experience should take an emotional and even an erotic form ; and our modern sense is swift to suspect something less unimpeachable than pure religion and undefiled behind a spiritual idyll whose charm even the most suspicious can hardly deny. At best we divine in it the sign-manual of a one-sidedly emotional and romantic soul, lacking that moral realism without which religion tends to be a fatal soporific. But on looking closer we find that this walk with Christ and the visions and consolations which succeeded it came to her at the end of certain hard and soul-harrowing " spiritual steps " by which she climbed the steep stairway of repentance. " In my process towards the road of Penance," she says, " I travelled by eighteen spiritual steps *before I knew the imperfection of my life* " [1]—so deeply had the sword of Divine love pierced that simple and joy-loving heart. Nor did that severe process of progressive self-knowledge end at the eighteenth " step." In a profound sense it cannot be said to have begun, even, until her love-hungry soul heard Christ say that He loved her, not among many other poor sinners, but better than anyone in her native valley. Many times, she assures her readers, He said these and other amazing words to her, and as she listened doubt

[1] *The Book of the Divine Consolation*, p. 2.

and fear sprang up like weeds in the new-made garden of her joy. But let her again tell her own story: "Again He said unto me, 'My beloved and My bride, love thou Me! All thy life, thy eating and drinking and sleeping and all that thou dost is pleasing unto Me.' . . . Then, when I heard these words, I did count over my sins and consider my faults, and how that I was not worthy of such great Love. And I did begin to cast doubt upon these words, wherefore my soul said unto Him who had spoken unto it, 'If Thou wert truly the Holy Spirit, Thou wouldst not speak thus unto me . . . seeing how that I am weak and frail and might grow vainglorious thereby thereat.' He answered me, 'Reflect and see if thou couldst be vainglorious because of all these things for the which thou art now grown proud; and see if thou couldst not perceive the folly of thy words by thinking of other things.' So then I did endeavour to grow vainglorious that I might prove if what He had said were true; and I began to gaze at the vineyards, that I might learn the folly of my word. And wheresoever I looked He said unto me, 'Behold and see, this is My creation,' and thereat did I feel the most ineffable sweetness. In the meantime I had remembered all my sins, and on my side I beheld nothing save sins and wrong-doing, *so that I did feel greater humility than I had ever felt before.*"[1]

Like all her subsequent visions, this first meeting with Christ was *dynamic* in character—*i.e.*, it was the symbolic expression of a deep spiritual and ethical change. To begin with, a new spiritual caution

[1] *The Book of the Divine Consolation*, p. 163.

awakes in her. Remembering her sin and weakness, she doubts whether the vision be not a delusion of sense or a wile of the devil. She looks straight into the treacherous depths that yawn beneath her emotional nature, and sees herself growing vainglorious. Almost like a modern soul, trying to relegate its vision to the realm of psychic abnormalities, she tries to work herself into a state of vainglory, as it were ; and when she does not succeed, she turns to those beauties of Nature which her mediæval superstition shuns as a source of temptation, feeling sure that, if her vision be indeed of God, even the opulent and alluring Umbrian scene could not blot it from her soul. And as she looks she knows once and for all that vineyards and hills and all the beautiful green earth and its denizens are the creation of Him whom she loves, and she becomes a true daughter of St. Francis. And with this transforming assurance of the authenticity of her vision there comes to her a deeper humility than she had ever known in her days of dim and painful striving after repentance.

There is something very germane to the modern soul in this deepening of her humility. Her sense of sin is not based upon a dry doctrinal conviction. It is in no sense the artificial product of " grovelling " conceptions of man's " total depravity " ; it is the spontaneous and passionate self-accusation of love in the presence of the supreme Love, the deep and sudden conviction of poverty and nakedness in face of the riches of offered grace. There is nothing " theological " about it. So feels the thoughtless and self-satisfied youth when a great love comes into his life.

Then all is swallowed up in one trembling *Non sum dignus*, and lowly kneeling, the gay cavalier receives the sacrament of love. So feels the well-meaning and benevolent idealist when he comes upon his ideal incarnate in a human life. So feels the sin-stained artist in the presence of a dewy dawn, of a tender, admonishing evening sky.

And the same sense of spiritual kinship grows on us as we go through her wonderful sequence of visions. They are by no means flawless. At times, indeed, they are childishly and somewhat distastefully mediæval. Her detailed and pedantic "application" of the physical suffering of Christ [1] and much in her visions of the Sacrament [2] are instances in point; while some of her visions are merely vivid recollections of what was known to her already, made actual by the dramatic energy of faith. But as we read with the understanding these blots vanish and we are gripped by the extraordinary intimacy, the unfaltering candour, and the psychological truth of this amazing spiritual autobiography. One thing that will strike readers whose acquaintance with Catholicism is limited to the Post-Tridentine, if not the Ultramontane, type is her *evangelical* quality. Christ comes to her and assures her of His immense love, not at the end of a life of bitter penance and laborious service, nor at the end of a long process of occult initiation

[1] *E.g.*, "And He showed unto me the pains of His head, particular the hairs plucked from His eyebrows and His beard," etc. (*The Book of the Divine Consolation*, p. 7). Compare also pp. 205, 206.

[2] *E.g.*, "Sometimes I have seen the throat of Christ in the Sacrament more splendid and beauteous than the sun. . . . Sometimes I have seen two eyes of great splendour, and so large that I beheld nothing of the Host save the edge thereof" (*The Book of the Divine Consolation*, p. 230).

and training after the manner of Eastern mystics and Western *dilettanti*, but at the beginning. As in evangelical theology, He is to her not the Rewarder, but the Creator of virtue; not the Crown of perfection, but the Perfecter. He comes with His most superlative assurances when her need is greatest and her desert least. More than once she hears Him saying that He loves her better than any human soul in the Spoletan valley, and each time the extravagance of the assurance (so unreal to our modern ears, but so easily understood by those who possess historical sense and are at home in the world of spiritual experience) is justified by the state of her soul. The first time it found her so saddened and discouraged by her past sins that it needed an expression of love that reached "unto folly" to inspire glad and humble confidence in the forgiving Love of God. The second time it came to her when she was "stirred by spiritual tribulation" and "for the space of a month" seemed to "feel nothing whatsoever of God." [1] When the assurance came to her on this occasion, it found her as timid and doubting as if it had come to her for the first time. "How may I believe this," she cries, "seeing that I am full of tribulation and do seem to be forsaken of God?" And the reassuring Voice makes answer, weaning her for ever from reliance upon moods and feelings: "When thou thinkest thyself to be most forsaken, then art thou most dearly beloved and nearest unto the eternal God." The dynamic character of the vision becomes immediately manifest, for on going to Communion a few days after-

[1] *The Book of the Divine Consolation*, pp. 245-248.

wards in a mood of sadness and fearsome misgiving she nevertheless found herself able to " enter into Christ " with a faith and security such as she had never before experienced—a deliverance the greatness of which only those who know what it is to be the dupes of their moods can rightly estimate.

From that dread, sweet walk with her Lord to the end of her pilgrimage her recorded visions represent the growth of her soul in the severe school of the saints. Mr. Algar Thorold [1] pertinently remarks that her book might be called, in the Hegelian sense of the term, the logic of sanctity. He is inclined to attribute the accuracy with which " the moments of what might be called the dialectical process of sanctification " are set forth to the editing of Blessed Angela's Franciscan director, Fra Arnaldo. But while it is quite likely that she went to her confessor for suggestions and correction, one cannot trace any actual " editing " in her writings. They seem to be the work of one hand only, and, while they show a deep spiritual understanding and a certain strong sanity behind a very charming manner, they do not suggest the trained thinker in even a single passage. They record the commerce of a pure, candid and entirely simple soul, strangely girlish to the very end and full of a delightful humanity which ranges her over against the passionate austerity of St. Teresa and the inhuman detachment of St. John of the Cross, and ranks her with our own natural and homely Lady Julian. There is perhaps nothing more enchanting and rare in all spiritual literature than her blend of an extraordinary

[1] *The Book of the Divine Consolation*, Introduction, pp. xxv, xxvi.

capacity for self-observation and self-analysis with a naïve and unconscious absorption in her spiritual world. She records her moods and emotions without a trace of morbidity, and in some elusive way which is far more than genius she never seems to stand outside herself. The records are frankly reflections upon what took place some time before, yet one cannot get away from the impression that these reflections are indeed an integral part of the vision they relate and, in that sense, continue. Her visions are without exception "intellectual," *i.e.*, unaccompanied by physical manifestations; but in relating them she does not affect that strained spirituality which is the peculiar temptation of mystics. She is unashamedly anthropomorphic, describing things invisible with the simplicity of a little child in terms of that which she has seen and felt and handled. Naturalness and a keen relish of beauty, harmony, and joy are characteristic of her all through, and make pure and cheerful melody to accompany her sternest encounters with Divine Grace.

Stern these encounters were, and not all her simple charm and freshness of narration can veil this severity from the discerning reader. Weak in not a few ways, but always conscious of her weakness, she yields herself to the inquisition and purging of God and is made wisely and sweetly strong, but not without pain. Scarcely is the first glad meeting with Christ over, when the sharpness of discipline is mingled with the sweetness of joy. Her second vision, while deepening her joy in knowing herself dearly loved of God, already brings a taste of that hardness. For when

she asks to be made able to bear the full manifestation of the Love she can only know in part she is refused. "If I were to do what thou askest," says the Voice, "thou wouldst have here all that thou desirest, and wouldst no longer hunger after Me." [1] Thus early must she learn that to covet "consolations" is spiritual gluttony, and be made to realise—surely a hard task for that simple "enjoying" soul!—that the life in God is a life of hungering and thirsting.

Her affectionate and clinging nature demands demonstrativeness from the Lover of her soul. Again and again she seeks a sign, and each time tells us in candid language how that sign was, not refused, indeed, but given far otherwise than she dreamed. The classic example is found in her tenth vision: "Then besought I Him that He would give me some tangible sign, something which I could see; such as putting a candle into my hand, or a precious stone, or some other thing, or that He would give me any sign He pleased. . . . Then He replied, 'This sign which thou seekest is one which would only give thee great joy when thou didst behold or touch it, but it would not free thee from doubt and thou mightest be deceived by that sign. Therefore will I give thee another sign . . . which will be for ever with thee, . . . The sign shall be this: thou shalt ever be fervent in love, and the love and the enlightened knowledge of God shall be ever with thee and in thee. This shall be a certain sign unto thee that I am He, because none but I can do this. . . . *My Love do I leave in thee, so that for Love of Me thou wilt endure tribula-*

[1] *The Book of the Divine Consolation*, p. 176.

tion.'" [1] At once on hearing this her soul forsook dreams of sweet rapture, ending in a speedy and painless assumption into Heaven—that favourite dream of the mediæval "religious"—and braced itself to every suffering in the loving service of God and man. Nothing could be more sudden, nothing more convincingly real. And the renunciation is made in the Franciscan spirit of unfaltering cheerfulness. There is no visible agony, no sombre struggle. "My love and my joy," she says, "was so great that I can in no wise express it." From first to last all her renunciations are made, all her hardships endured—and we can only guess how terribly severe her self-denial was, for she says little concerning it—with the characteristic gaiety of those who have heard the very Voice of Jesus. No Divine demand was stern enough to cloud her joy in God, her only trouble being a certain "weariness of waiting to be fully joined to her Lord," because of which she was sometimes "plunged into mortal pain." [2] For the rest, this brave and loving spirit delights in the "immense cunning" of the great Fisher of men who hides His barbed hooks in morsels of surpassing sweetness. "It is given unto me to see Christ," she says, "who draweth me with such gentleness that sometimes He saith, 'Thou art I, and I am thou.' I see those eyes, and that face so gracious and pleasing, which embraceth and draweth my soul unto itself with infinite assurance. And that which proceedeth from those eyes and that face is nothing else save that Good . . . wherein I delight so greatly

[1] *The Book of the Divine Consolation*, pp. 198-199.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 186.

that I can in no wise speak of it." [1] And again she clothes the completeness of her renunciation in a song of praise which filled her days and nights, so she tells us with joy. "Thee do I praise, oh God, my delight," she exclaims, "for upon Thy Cross have I made my bed." [2] Upon that bed she lay racked but radiant until the hour of her death, asking nothing but the three beloved companions of her Lord—poverty, suffering and contempt—yet never falling into the gloom of *accidie* or the inertia of quietism. Setting out on pilgrimage with only one chosen companion, her heart enlarged as she went on, and soon she gathered round her a wide family of "children." Twice at least she had a special consolation after her own heart. Once she heard Christ saying to all who followed Him in the way of Holy Poverty that the cup of His bitter passion was rendered sweet unto Him through their love [3]—a word that surely thrilled her devoted spirit. At another time, when she was very ill, He stood at her bed, saying, "I am come to serve thee," [4] and His "service" was to give her what she most desired, a clear spiritual perception of His grace and beauty.

To the end she subjected her visions to the most faithful and searching examination in her power, and abated not one jot from her severe but wholesome self-introspection. Thus at the moment when the perfection and profundity of Christ's love toward her come home to her and her soul rushes out in pas-

[1] *The Book of the Divine Consolation*, pp. 184-185.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 185.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 242.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 243.

sionate response, she tests her sincerity by the absolute truth of the Divine affection and says: "I have served Thee with lies, and I have never desired to draw nigh unto Thee in very truth, *for fear lest I might feel those burdens which Thou didst feel and bear for my sake.*" [1] To those unacquainted with mediæval religious literature this seems curiously modern in its implied insistence upon our obligation to ask a humble share in the atoning suffering, instead of acquiescing in a doctrine which would make a passive acceptance of Christ's sufferings on our behalf sufficient for the remission of sins.

III

As Blessed Angela's death drew near, the welfare of her numerous 'children" lay much on her heart. She who had begun her religious life in that spirit of "holy" selfishness and heartlessness which has caused her to be held up by modern writers as *the* warning example of the mystic as he ought *not* to be was in the end surrounded by a "family" for whose sake she gladly curtailed her hours of solitary joy in her Lord, and whom she taught not only the love of the brethren, but love towards that whole world of men which, once despised, was now so dear to her heart. Four of her consoling visions referred to her "children," and in them the core of delight lay for her in the generous and affectionate praise with which Christ spoke of many of them.

When she foresaw her death from afar, she "with

[1] *The Book of the Divine Consolation*, p. 207.

great affection did constrain her writer" to pen her last, passionate song of adoration to the incarnate God.[1] "O burning Love," she cries, "Thou hast effaced Thyself. . . . Oh, Thou incomprehensible One Who hast made Thyself comprehensible for me." And then, in words that are edged with fire, she enumerates the seven gifts of Christ to her: life, eternity, the sacrifice of Christ, the reason to understand this sacrifice, the capacity to apprehend God, wisdom that knows the burning love of God, and lastly love itself, for God is Love. In these flaming words, halting through sheer passionate desire, we recognise the girl (and indeed she was of them that cannot grow old) who had so often stood before that favoured priest, Fra Arnaldo, deaf to the words he read to her, but with soul a-tiptoe to catch the whisper of God, so wrought with ecstasy that "at times her eyes shone like candles and her face was as a rose."

But at the end as at the beginning sober ethical judgment was wedded to rapture, and in a spirit of instructed and watchful moral judgment she frames her "last testament"[2] to her children. She ascribes praise to God, seeing that He gave into her care "all His sons and daughters who are in this world, both here and beyond the sea." That care was a solemn reality to her. "I have been as careful of them as I was able," she testifies at the brink of death, "and I have grieved and suffered more sorrow because of them than ye would readily believe." Then follows her last "commandment"[3] to her family, which is

[1] *The Book of the Divine Consolation*, pp. 252-258.
[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 258-262.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 261.

"mutual love and profound humility." She warns them against spiritual pride—"greater deception still is there in spiritual self-sufficiency even than in the worldly"—and she bids them, in a passage partially quoted already, to extend their love "unto all people."

Her last vision came to her about Christmas, 1309.[1] Once more on earth Christ came to her, showing her the bridal garment wherein she was to appear before saints and angels—"neither of purple, nor of scarlet, nor of sendal, nor of samite, but a certain marvellous light which clothed the soul." As He had once, and more than once, startled her soul into ineffable joy by telling her that He loved her better than any in her valley, so now, when that joy is being clouded with the last shadow, He assures her that He will not commit the soul He loved to the charge of angels or saints, but that He will "come personally" to fetch her. Receiving that promise with a peaceful mind and with deep humility, she again and again commends her spirit into the Father's hands; then turns to her friends to tell them that she has received an answer to that committal. "It is impossible," she hears Christ say to her, "that in death thou shouldst lose that which has been impressed upon thine heart in life." This was her last recorded utterance, and thereafter she lay in repose of body and cheerfulness of spirit, until upon the Octave of the Innocents the Eternal Lover who had called her across the Umbrian hills and walked with her all the way led her into the presence of God.

[1] *The Book of the Divine Consolation*, pp. 262-264.

Her influence did not die with her, and an Italian version of her *Book of Visions* made in 1510 from the Latin of Fra Arnaldo was one of the earliest and most popular religious books printed in Italian and took its place beside the *Dialogues* of St. Catherine of Siena and the *Little Flowers* of St. Francis. Through Ubertino da Casale she influenced Dante. Ubertino, who had been spiritually enlightened by those " two great practisers of seraphic wisdom," Peter of Siena and Cecilia of Florence, but still lived laxly in his monastery, met Blessed Angela in 1298 and owed his soul to her, as he freely acknowledges : " She restored, yea, a thousandfold, all the gifts of my soul that had been lost through mine own sinfulness, so that, from that time, I have not been the same man that I was before. When I had experienced the splendours of her flaming virtue, she changed the whole face of my mind ; and drove out infirmities and languors from my soul and body, and renewed my mind that before was rent with distraction that no one who had known me previously could doubt that the Spirit of Christ was begotten anew in me through her." Seven years after coming under her influence he wrote that strange and fascinating book, *Arbor Vitæ Crucifixæ Jesu*, the last of the literary sources of the *Divina Commedia*.

IV

We may briefly sum up the claim of Blessed Angela to be considered a typical mystic under the following heads :—

(1) She neither teaches nor exemplifies a mechanical

sequence called the Mystic Way. In her spiritual life purgation and illumination go hand in hand and react upon each other, while fugitive but genuine anticipations of the unitive life gladden her, not at the end, but at rough or dark places all along her pilgrimage. She thus satisfies our instinct for a natural development in consonance with that grace which *gives* before it demands.

(2) She exhibits in a marked degree the influence of both the institutional and the mystical elements of religion upon the growth ot the Christian soul. Like most Catholic mystics, she was a devout and frequent communicant, and frequently found the starting-point of vision in the Eucharist. But she never conceives the Eucharist as conveying a grace different in kind or independent of the grace given to believing, prayerful souls at other times. Thus, when she is reluctant to communicate because of great desolation of soul at the remembrance of her sins, she hears Christ saying, " It pleaseth Me that thou shouldst communicate—because if thou receivest Me, thou hast already received Me ; and if thou receivest Me not, thou hast received Me all the same." [1] And so on this as on other occasions, she went to communion consciously to receive One whom she had received already in the depth of her soul. Again she tells of feeling Christ within her soul, not after having received the elements, but during the elevation.[2] And the same balance is maintained all through. She receives a vision in the open road on her way to

[1] *The Book of the Divine Consolation*, p. 246.
[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 223-224.

church, but this does not stop her from going into the church and taking part in its worship as she had first intended.

(3) She combines with a degree of deep and absorbed contemplation of the Ineffable, wonderful in one so unschooled, a constant and ever-deepening conviction of sin and a constant recourse to the redeeming Cross. "When God gives life to a soul," says Ruysbroeck, "the chasm between herself and Him appears immense"; and this was characteristically true of Blessed Angela. Her contemplation takes her into that dim and perilous "darkness"—that "negative way" which is the legacy of Neoplatonism to Christian Mysticism—and again, with sublime audacity, she sees herself "wholly clean, wholly pure, wholly sanctified, wholly upright, wholly assured, and wholly celestial in Him."[1] Yet there is no trace of spiritual megalomania, of any claim to "deification." Her daring glimpse into the Divine dark breeds "mortification of sins." When the Voice says unto her, "Thou art the temple of My delight, and the heart of the Omnipotent God resteth upon thy heart," she records how in the midst of her joy she remembered her sins and esteemed that there was nothing in her that could be pleasing to God.[2] When her responsive heart brims over with that fulness of love which Christ left her for a "sign," it comes to her that "whoso desireth to keep the grace that he hath shall not turn his eyes away from the Cross."[3] From beginning to end a truly evangelical spirit, which has

[1] *The Book of the Divine Consolation*, p. 191.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 196.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 201.

its root, not in doctrinal orthodoxy, but in the "fundamental orthodoxy of love," underlies her passion for spiritual adventure, her daring, darting flight into the bosom of the Ineffable. But while this fundamental disposition gives authenticity and weight to the romantic quests of her soul, it is in its turn steeped in the heroic and romantic quality that was her very nature. Thus it comes that her theological "orthodoxy" does not irritate the theological free-lance, provided he possess spiritual sympathy, and that her religious impressionism does not offend the discerning evangelical believer.

(4) She exemplifies in a most convincing manner what Mr. Algar Thorold admirably describes as the positive quality of the saint, namely, love expressing itself in joy.[1] With this quality her book is informed from end to end. It radiates a spiritual gaiety which is miles removed from the heartless mystic joy (so-called) of the amateur of Eternity, but is the very smile on the face of love. Thus, when she knew herself to be under the very glance of God, she says that her soul felt such joy under that holy inquisition that no human tongue did declare it. She finds "a new and most excellent pleasure" at almost every step of her brave and humble ascent, and even beneath her most sober and mournful utterances there ripples the quenchless joy of a simple, loving, wholly surrendered spirit. Warmly human, yet incomprehensible and even repellent to natural

[1] "The positive quality of the saint is love expressing itself in joy. Thus he is a fascinating combination of the familiar and the unfamiliar; for, if few of us are ascetics, we have most of us some experience of love" (*The Book of the Divine Consolation*, Introduction, p. xxii).

humanity, this joy, which is one of the most authentic mystical qualities, is seen in her in its purity and simplicity.

(5) While yielding to some extent to the superstition of her time and to the peculiar temptations of the mystic temperament, she shows that combination of the heroic and the submissive, the active and the passive, the austere and the tender, the sober and the passionate, which makes up the rare and winsome *temperantia* of the best mystics. She has none of the constitutional timidity of the conventional feminine devotee. Hers was no warm-flannel goodness, but those " splendours of flaming virtue " which Ubertino recognised, and which could change the whole face of a man's mind. Yet she had the most instant sense of responsibility, the most scrupulous care, lest, by the naïve recital of her audacious visions, she might misrepresent the majesty and grace of God. It is easy to gain a certain futile balance by avoiding "extremes," but to venture upon the deep seas of love and passion, and yet remember the familiar music of the homely burn, is the high sanity of the saints and the crown of the true mystic.

CHAPTER VII

MYSTICISM AND NATURE: ASCETICISM

Christianity does not *as yet* take in the whole of man; it is the bringer of the sword, setting one part of his nature in array against the other; it bids him emphatically lay down his life, but to what end? *That he may take it again.* We do not gain a true conception of Christianity until we look at it under this two-fold aspect; until we see in it a seed sown in weakness to be raised in power.

DORA GREENWELL.

There lies the crown
Which all thy longing cures.
Refuse it, mortal, that it may be yours!
It is a Spirit, though it seems red gold,
And such no man may but by shunning hold.
Refuse it, till refusing be despair,
And thou shalt feel the phantom in thy hair.

COVENTRY PATMORE.

That I may know Him and . . . the fellowship of His sufferings.

ST. PAUL.

SYNOPSIS.

Four mystical types—The three "roads" of Plotinus—Divisions misleading—"A. E." as an example of the mixed type. I. The great ascetics: their strength, definiteness, and militant courage—St. Teresa on "silly devotions"—St. Catherine of Siena on "manly courage"—The repellent aspect of mediæval asceticism—Ruysbroeck's "horrible" joy—Prayer of a Carmelite nun—St. Bernard's attitude to Nature—St. Augustine's execration of light. II. Asceticism cannot be dismissed as an aberration—Its secret of strength and victory—The great ascetics influenced and still influence the world they despised—Peculiar attraction of ascetic Mysticism—The practical and revolutionary force of the great ascetics: St. Benedict, St. Bernard, St. Catherine of Siena, St. Teresa—Their strength the outcome of faith in a crucified God—Their irreducible and daring logic—Ascetic excesses mere accidents—The essence of Asceticism: a strong personal devotion to a Crucified Redeemer—Not a theory, but an experience—The fellowship of His sufferings—The vicarious element in asceticism. III. The relation between asceticism and the mystic vision—The revealing power of penitential love—The essence of Puritanism—Its relation to art—The true meaning of "Art for Art's sake"—St. Catherine of Genoa—Dame Gertrude More and Zeb-un-Nissa on disinterested love—The mystic's love of suffering not morbid: Let me suffer *with Him*. IV. The inwardness of mystic asceticism—St. John of the Cross on true self-denial—Bishop Chandler on making God a means—Ruysbroeck on chastity—The vine-clad Cross—The gaiety of the great ascetics—Pain a sacrament—The Cross and Nature—The mystic's simple acceptance of the failure and ignominy of the Cross—The dark night of dereliction—The pain of spiritual dryness—St. Mechthild of Magdeburg on spiritual forsakenness—Validity of the ascetic principle.

CHAPTER VII

MYSTICISM AND NATURE: ASCETICISM

The relations of the mystics to Nature (in which term we, of course, include human nature) are sufficiently varied and complex to make anything like generalisation extremely hazardous. Mysticism is not all of one type, and in viewing its relation to Nature a fourfold division suggests itself. There are the Mediæval Devotional mystics, who practised a more or less monastic asceticism; the Philosophical mystics, who, in individual cases, practised a stern asceticism but whose ideal was temperance rather than renunciation; the Nature-mystics, who, generally speaking, turned their back upon the world of civilisation and found the Kingdom of God in a flower; and what has been called the Love-mystics, to whom human love was sacramental in the Catholic sense. These last are obviously the antipodes of the first class. While the ascetic mystic renounces love and beauty as hindrances to the soul's communion with God, the Love-mystic sees God giving Himself to men in the kiss of human love. Some such division as this is suggested by Plotinus, when he says of spiritual apprehension that "there are different roads by which this end may be reached: the love of beauty which exalts the poet; that devotion to the One and that ascent of

science which make the ambition of the philosopher; and that love and those prayers by which some devout and ardent soul tends in its moral purity towards perfection. These are the great highways conducting to that height above the actual and the particular, where we stand in the immediate presence of the Infinite, who shines out as from the deeps of the soul." [1]

But such a division, while it may be allowed to stand, is necessarily imperfect and even misleading. There are forms of genuinely mystical feeling which partake of the characteristics of all four types in some measure, and conform wholly to none. Many mystics exhibit a blend of two out of the four types, and it is interesting to note how not a few Love-mystics have an ascetic or Puritan strain mingling with their passionate and sensuous worship of the Divine seen through the rainbow glass of beauty or the veil of human desire. The work of the poet-mystic, "A. E." (Mr. George Russell) is a case in point. Viewed from one angle, he is a whole-hearted worshipper of earth's beauty, not, indeed, in the pagan sense, but as one who, eating bread with joy and tasting the juice of the grape to the last exquisite drop, knows them to be transubstantiated into the true Body and Blood of the Lord. Earth seems the perfect sacrament to him, in which symbol and Reality are made one in a lucid identity and equivalence. In this mood he rebukes those who see in the earth the contradiction of our immortality:

[1] Letter to Flaccus.

"But I have touched the lips of clay,
Mother, thy rudest sod to me
Is thrilled with fire of hidden day,
And haunted by all mystery." [1]

And again:

"I saw the mystic vision flow
And live in men and woods and streams,
Until I could no longer know
The dream of life from my own dreams.

. . . . .

"It scrawled the human mystery—
Dim heraldry—on light and air;
Wavering along the starry sea
I saw the flying vision there—

. . . . .

"At last, at last, the meaning caught—
The spirit wears its diadem,
It shakes the wondrous plumes of thought
And trails the stars along with them." [2]

Instances of this sacramentarian doctrine might easily be multiplied from Mr. Russell's work. The classic example is, of course, the well-known "I begin through the grass once again to be bound to the Lord," [3] where the poet, seeking refuge with his mother, the earth, and laying his hot face against "the cool, green tresses that mantle her breast," finds that in touching the soft, green hair of the earth he has touched—God.

But there is another side to "A. E.'s" Nature-Mysticism. "On the laugh of a child I am borne to the joy of the King" is not his final word. The

[1] *Collected Poems*, p. 34.
[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 266-267.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 270.

symbol that seemed to be so perfect and infallible a vehicle of Divinity reveals itself in one aspect as an illusion—as all but a delusion; and we get lines of such austere quality as "The Symbol Seduces":

"There, in her old-world garden, smiles
A symbol of the world's desire,
Striving with quaint and lovely wiles
To bind to earth the soul of fire.

"And while I sit and listen there,
The robe of Beauty falls away
From universal things to where
Its image dazzles for a day.

"Away! the great life calls; I leave
For Beauty, beauty's rarest flower;
For Truth, the lips that ne'er deceive;
For Love, I leave love's haunted bower." [1]

Here we have the ascetic spirit—the spirit that made the lives of St. Teresa, St. Catherine of Siena, St. John of the Cross, and countless other mystic saints, one long renunciation. And that iron string vibrates through "A. E.'s" poetry from first to last—a solemn haunting refrain to stanzas of radiant delight. Quick to repudiate the dogmas and convictions of traditional Christianity, this poet, who would, we suspect, have scant patience with conventional asceticism, feels the age-long struggle between what our forefathers used to call sacred and profane love, the implacable enmity between flesh and spirit, never so bitter or agonising as when the flesh, refined to a transparent beauty, clothes itself in the very robes of the spirit. The monk who, after the first heroic

[1] *Collected Poems*, p. 27.

flush of exaltation is over, wonders with reeling brain if the world is really but a shadow and Heaven the only substance, and who, having persuaded himself by the logic of his creed that it is indeed so, prays that his revolting heart might feel as his brain thinks, could not find a better spokesman than this modern theosophical Nature-mystic:

"Love and pity are pleading with me this hour.
What is this Voice that stays me, forbidding to yield,
Offering Beauty, Love and Immortal Power
Aeons away in some far-off heavenly field?

"Though I obey thee, Immortal, my heart is sore.
Though love be withdrawn for Love it bitterly grieves:
Pity withheld in the breast makes sorrow more.
Oh that the heart could feel what the mind believes!"[1]

We have singled out "A. E." as an example of the intersection of two apparently opposite types of Mysticism, because in his work it is shown more clearly than anywhere else how it belongs to the very essence of Nature- and Love-Mysticism to merge at its intensest point into that which seems to be its negation. It is when the symbol has had its perfect work, when it has become a crystalline medium of Divinity, that it is shattered by the Reality which fills it. It is not the man with no eye for beauty and no passionate comprehension of love, who casts doubt upon their complete and self-contained perfection. It is he who has received the Divine through them who feels their blurring as well as their illuminating power, and

[1] *Collected Poems*, p. 189.

is most anxious not to lose the Bride in contemplating the veil that shrouds her. But while we recognise that clear-cut divisions and classifications are never so misleading as in the case of living souls, and that in the case of the mystics especially rigid lines of demarcation are impossible, we shall find it convenient to retain the conventional classification in our study of the mystical attitude to the natural world.

I

The time is past when we looked upon the great mediæval mystic-saints as weak, sentimental, and morbid creatures. Our conception of them is no longer derived from pious prints of St. Sebastian smiling somewhat idiotically while bestuck with arrows like a pin-cushion with pins, or of St. Catherine with hands meekly folded across her breast and a weak simper on her lips as she murmurs the edifying *mot* printed underneath. A closer acquaintance with the lives and works of these saints has convinced us that, so far from being effeminate and anæmic, they belong to the iron age when the Christian mystic, no less than his more matter-of-fact fellow believer, was essentially a soldier. Instances of weak and foolish sentiment may be culled from their annals, no doubt ; but their roots go deep into the harsh, stubborn soil which produced the saints of the early Church. Through the sweetness and romance which shed so wonderful a glamour over the writings of the mediæval mystics there runs a thread of steel. Strength, definiteness, militant courage are their fundamental

characteristics; shrewd sense and an often mordant satire the salt of their meekness. "Dulness is not sanctity," Erasmus once exclaimed; and dulness was no ingredient in the sanctity of mediæval Mysticism. "From silly devotions, good Lord, deliver us!" [1] cried St. Teresa in her *Autobiography*. "It is certain that the love of God does not consist in tears, nor in this sweetness and tenderness which we for the most part desire . . . but rather in serving Him in justice, fortitude and humility." [2] And St. Catherine of Siena hears her Lord say: "Therefore bear yourself with manly courage; for unless you do so, you will not prove yourselves to be spouses of My Truth and faithful children, nor of the company of those who relish the taste of My honour, and the salvation of souls." [3]

So, while once we shrank from the ideal of these mediæval saints on the score of its honeyed feebleness, we are to-day repelled by its naked severity. Our sweetly reasonable spirit is offended by the harsh violence of their assault upon the Kingdom of Heaven. Our beauty-loving soul is shocked by the frank ugliness of these worn and emaciated figures which—with the exception of the blithe and lovable little St. Francis—seem to us to lack charm and poetry. The sentimentally romantic amateur may possibly invest them with some unguessed attractiveness, but to cool and level eyes their colossal renunciations, dreary self-denials, inhuman austerities, and brutal

[1] *Autobiography*, xiii, 24.
[2] *Ibid.*, xi, 20.
[3] *The Dialogue of St. Catherine of Siena*, "A Treatise of Divine Providence," p. 39.

self-mutilations are merely repellent, if not disgusting. These saints do not move across the stage of life to sublime and stirring music. Poetry falls mute in face of their grim discipline. Pictorial art despairs of these pale, unwavering eyes, those angular, emaciated frames. St. Bernard scourging his body to the point of death; St. Catherine of Siena hugging silence in her arms through long, hard years; St. Teresa crying out in the grip of her fierce infatuation with pain, "Let me suffer or not live"; St. John of the Cross, whose cruelty to his soul exceeded even his indescribable bodily severities; St. Rose of Lima disfiguring her face and neck and thrusting her beautiful hands into hot lime to escape the admiration of men—is there anything in these to appeal or convince? In them religion is a fretting trouble, a nagging goad, a Nessus-shirt of iron and flame which tortures its wearer to madness. We may admire their grim tenacity of purpose, their indefeasible fortitude. But what sane Christian man would incite his soul against his body, till the frail house lay shattered and in ruins about the spirit it had sought to harbour? What true woman would trample on every feminine instinct till the very Christ was robbed of all charm in her crucified and emptied imagination? Such, we say, is not the sainthood which Christ has taught us; it is not the temper of those who have drunk wine with Jesus at the marriage feast. Above all, how can so inhuman a discipline be a true *præparatio mystica?* Ruysbroeck cries out, "Needs must I rejoice beyond the age, although the world has horror of my joy!" He might have added, "And the

Church"; for such joy is, indeed, horrible with the horror of the unnatural, if not the maniacal, to those who walk in the clear, warm air of a genial evangelical Christianity.

It is, of course, quite easy to show that mediæval asceticism is not Christian; that it rests upon a Manichæan dualism, and that, in the last resort, it makes morality impossible and defeats its own ultimate object of union with the Divine. To cease looking upon Nature and all the sweet and tender human ties as means of grace and to view them as hindrances, as part of that "flesh" that lusts against the Spirit and against which the Spirit must ever lust, is the way, not to "deification," but to dehumanisation. A so-called love of God which strikes human love in the face can only have one logical ending—the creation of a fictitious world and the alienation of the soul from ultimate Reality. Of all the many ways of cutting the world in two with a hatchet, none is so tragically disastrous as the separation of the love of God from the love of one's brethren, from simple joy in natural beauty, and from a self-respect that includes the body as a temple of the Holy Ghost which it is sacrilege to belittle or neglect. All this is obvious to us at this late day, and asceticism in its severer forms provokes us to impatience. We believe in the essential humanity of God, and in the Incarnation as the sign and pledge that God dwells in man and is mediated to us through human relationships. Nor does our reading of the life and mind of Jesus leave us with any doubt as to the untenability of a view of the world which makes the beauty of earth and sky an enemy

against which the soul that God has cleansed is pledged to undying warfare.

It comes upon us with a sense of despair that such things can survive in our own century, to read of a young Carmelite nun pledging herself and a companion never to raise their eyes during meal-time in the refectory and making such a prayer as this: "O Jesus, in honour and in imitation of the example Thou gavest in the house of Herod, Thy two little spouses resolve to keep their eyes cast down in the refectory. When that impious king scoffed at Thee, O Infinite Beauty, no complaint came from Thy lips. Thou didst not even deign to fix on him Thy adorable eyes. He was not worthy of the favour; but we, who are Thy spouses, we desire to draw Thy Divine gaze upon ourselves. As often as we refrain from raising our eyes, we beg Thee to reward us by a glance of love." And when we try to persuade ourselves that this is merely a degeneracy of modern ultramontane piety, we remember how St. Bernard rode for a whole day along the enchanting shores of Lake Leman, with eyes held steadily to the ground, lest the sight of natural beauty lured his soul from its contemplation of God; and how St. Augustine cursed the light of day which distracted him from his devotions. In face of such facts we ask, why trouble about the ascetic attitude towards Nature at all? How can a philosophy so perverse, a theology so inhuman, contain a message for our day? Why not shelve it once for all as an aberration which had no share in the making of saints, who were saints in spite of it, and bore no relation to their mystic vision?

II

It is easy enough to dismiss asceticism as a superseded point of view so long as we discuss it abstractly. But when we view it in vital relation to the great mediæval mystics and saints it becomes a different matter altogether, and our abstract and somewhat contemptuous disapproval is transformed into a wistful wonder. For in that extreme and unlovely *askesis* which we think we can so easily prove "altogether wrong both from the rational and the spiritual point of view" we divine some hidden leaven, some unguessed dynamic which wins not only the Kingdom it desires, but also the world which it despises. What do we see? We see these gaunt and *outré* saints, with their grotesque and tragic self-stultifications, succeeding where a broader, saner way of life has failed. Their life has a tang, a salt sting, which ours lacks: it has not "failed of that prick which is God." St. Francis, St. Bernard, St. Catherine of Siena, St. Ignatius Loyola—can we mention representatives of a more reasonable and genial Christianity who have subjugated the world as these did? Which exponents of liberal creeds are as adequate to their age as they were to theirs? And even to-day they conquer where we fail, and carry citadels that resist our every onslaught. What chance has the sanest and ablest religious writer of to-day in the study or studio of the cultured neo-pagan? But the *Little Flowers* of St. Francis is found there side by side with Anatole France, and St. John of the Cross keeps strange company with Oscar Wilde. Men and women who never

darken church doors and barely hang on to the outmost fringe of society are stirred by the flaming ardour of St. Teresa, touched and purified by the dewy self-communings of Blessed Angela de Foligno, and awed by the spiritual magnificence of St. Catherine of Siena. They catch the very accent of Galilee from the talks of St. Rose of Lima with her birds and flowers, and are smitten with the beauty of humility as they con the wise simplicities of *The Imitation of Christ*. While we strain our ingenuity and the inclusive power of Christianity to the utmost in our efforts to win these gifted and wayward children of a decadent civilisation, they receive with grateful hearts a grain of the true leaven, a spark of the hidden fire from the fleshless hands of these forbidding ascetics and world-despisers. Nor can we explain it by saying that it is the specifically mystical and not the ascetic element in these saints which attracts. That is undoubtedly true, but it is *their* type of Mysticism, not the equally valid and beautifully expressed type of a Traherne, a Whichcote, or even a Wordsworth. It is a Mysticism which blossoms only on the soil of that conviction which lies behind asceticism.

And when we make efficiency in the affairs of Church and State a test of authentic saintship, the result is the same. While other types, from Plotinus downwards, have been noted for practical sense and capability, it has been the great cloistered ascetics that have turned the world upside down. Humble St. Benedict, starting "a school in which men may serve God," secured the education of mediæval Europe. Retiring St. Bernard, by dint of his elo-

quence, genius and statesmanship, retarded the great intellectual revolution which, in the end, broke his heart and shortened his life. St. Catherine of Siena, immoderate lover of solitude and silence, faced popes and cardinals, holding the honour of the Church in her hands and quelling forces that appalled the strongest men of her age. St. Teresa, the stern and ardent visionary, effected that most difficult of all reformations—the regeneration of a religious Order. And this robust and effective impact upon the world is characteristic in greater or smaller measure of all the great ascetics. Where is the key of their secret? We recognise that their ruthless renunciations and austerities, so far from being means of grace, are avenues of temptation, or, at best, crippling disabilities. In what sign, then, did they triumph?

Briefly, they were true to the profound and daring logic of their faith in a crucified God. Their Mysticism was not an emotion or an artistic intuition; it was the mighty and mordant dialectic of a tremendous spiritual argument. If God indeed seeks the soul of man and stakes His utmost for its capture against all rivals, then must not the redeemed soul meet such an advance with a like abandonment, a like adventurous daring? If Jesus be the Son of God, then His followers can accept no broader, smoother way of life than that of the Cross. If to be one with Christ means to share His painful travail, then "let us suffer or not live." There is nothing extravagant about these masters of the spiritual life; there is merely that "giving of all for all" which is the condition of every great and serious business. Their

lives were the simple outcome of that irreducible logic of theirs. They had seen Jesus! And once a soul has seen Jesus and dares to abide by its vision, life is a very simple matter, and has all the hardness and difficulty of simple things. Such lives are a thorn in the side of a generation which covets their simplicity but shrinks from their hardness. A religion whose logic is the logic of the nail-studded Cross rankles like a splinter in souls unready to accept it.

To criticise their ascetic excesses and trace them to a perverted conception of sanctity and to a vicious philosophical dualism is entirely beside the mark. That these excesses did have their root in a defective ideal of saintship and in a dualistic conception of things is beyond dispute. But these excesses are not of the essence of asceticism: they are the mistaken expressions of an eternally valid conviction. What lay behind these inhuman mortifications was not an impersonal ideal or philosophical theory, but the longing of redeemed souls to know Christ and the fellowship of His sufferings. If we of to-day hold a view of God and the world which sets no value upon, but rather deprecates, the crucifixion of the flesh, the bruising and buffeting of the body, then it belongs to us, if we too would suffer with Christ, to match the bodily severities of the great ascetics with a spiritual discipline even more profound and searching. In analysing their ideals and conceptions we constantly tend to omit the fundamental factor: *their strong, personal love to Jesus* and the simplicity with which they took His words in sober earnest. They

had heard Him say that he who would save his life must lose it, and, taking Him unreservedly at His word, they discovered by experience that we cannot really know the meaning of life—the true taste and colour of it—until we throw it away. We of to-day, who have so largely lost the secret of a strong, devoted, intimately personal love to a living Lord, would reduce their life to a theory. We would say that they had discovered that we live in a universe "marked on every side with crosses" and that things were so constituted that only sacrifice can survive, and that the cynic little knew how profound a truth he uttered when he remarked that there was only one way of succeeding in the world—to let oneself be crucified. But their minds were tuned to another key. Their only wisdom was to keep their souls fixed on their Lord with the directness and simplicity of loving intention, meeting every demand, evading nothing, questioning nothing. They called Him Beloved, and fastened His name on their hearts, not in a weakly, sentimental mood, but in fixed and unalterable purpose, pledging themselves in simple fidelity and courage to do and dare, to suffer and endure all He bids them, all His service involves.

Inspired by so deep and ennobling a passion, their asceticism was redeemed from the selfishness and pettiness of the average cloistered religious of their age. They suffered, not to gain salvation for their own souls, but with Christ; and with Christ for the Church and for the world. The suggestion that to attempt to share the atoning sufferings of Christ was to belittle His work for us would have evoked a

blank stare of bewilderment from them. As well suggest that to pray for others is to belittle the intercession of the eternal High Priest. They believed that we are members of Christ's Body, and that therefore He cannot make His saving oblation of Himself without us. And so they offered themselves, as they understood it in their day, in union with the Crucified.

III

We now come to the bearing of their asceticism upon their mystic vision. The relation between the two is far closer than some interpreters like to admit. There is a vision that is seen only by the eye of penitence, discerned only in the great illuminating moments of love, given only to those who enter into Life maimed. It is the great vision which the whole world is consciously or unconsciously longing for, the merest second-hand account of which stirs strange chords in wayward and battered souls. The great ascetics *practised* penitence. To them contrition was not a mood, but a vocation. This is the gate to illumination, and he who tries to enter in any other way is a thief and a robber, though he call himself a mystic. Only penitence can see "with open face" the one vision that can subdue and satisfy a world—the vision of a Man on a Cross—and this vision the ascetics had. They strove after an interior knowledge of sin, after a glimpse of the Love that sin has stricken to the heart; and, say what we will, here and nowhere else is the beginning of illumination, the great wisdom of unsealed eyes. It is at once a daring

adventure and a sweet safety, for the contrite heart is an explorer of new planets and a dweller at the Father's hearth. "Satan," says John Pulsford quaintly, "can convert illumination into a snare, but contrition is beyond his art."

They had the purged eye, the disciplined and chastened soul which alone can see the vision in its purity of outline. We are slowly coming back to the stern truth that only the pure can see either the beauty of heaven or the beauty of earth, and that purity, in all but a few rarely-endowed souls, cannot be gained or kept without a stern and frequently painful discipline. We are coming to realise once more that ecstasy of spirit can only be had at the expense of ecstasy of sense; that one cannot be drunk with wine and filled with the Spirit at the same time. It is dawning upon us that laxity and hedonism are not only the enemies of spiritual life, but the destruction of all true art. The lesson is writ large over history, and the close connection of Puritanism—using that word in its widest sense, as applying to St. Teresa far more than to Oliver Cromwell—with the truest and most glorious art need not be emphasised. The world's great artists have never been slow to perceive the things that belonged to their peace. That is why we find Michelangelo and Botticelli in the train of Savonarola. After a wave of phallic immoralism which perverted art to a disease, we are once more groping our way to the conviction expressed by Mark Rutherford when he contended that "a perfect form or a delicate colour are the expression of something which is destroyed in us by subjugation to the baser

desires or meannesses ; and he who has been unjust to man or woman misses the true interpretation of a cloud or falling wave."

In this sense the great mediæval ascetics were inspirers of art, but it must be remembered that, in the case of the great mystic saints at any rate, they did not start from a theory of morals, nor were they preoccupied with the conscious culture of either character or conduct. Here, again, their attitude sprang from the simplicity and unreservedness of surrender to One whom to know and serve was their life, and who called them to the way of the Cross. The strange and thrilling beauty of their utterance, the lambent passion which turned words into tongues of living flame, were the outcome of their simple acceptance of the Cross. From no other root could spring flowers whose purity is the delight of virgin souls, whose many-coloured splendour quickens the jaded worldling with a sudden, wild throb of spiritual desire. And as they embraced the Cross till the nails found their quivering flesh, it blossomed wondrously like Aaron's rod, simply because they did not seek blossoms ; they sought only to give love for love, to give all for all, to ask for nothing and require back nothing, but only to abide purely and unhesitatingly in Him who had called them and for whom they longed. Already the talk of "Art for art's sake," of disinterested absorption in beauty and a contemplation of Nature for other purposes than to point a moral, is dying away. Principles sufficiently valid in themselves have acquired a vicious significance in the mouth of those who are actuated, not by the high

indifference and impartiality which sees the pathos and splendour of life in the slime of earth as well as in the purity of the lily, but by the prurient instinct of sensualism. Yet behind them lies an immortal truth—the truth the mystic saints knew. Theirs it was to give themselves up to their object with no *arrière pensée*, merely for its own sweet and glorious sake. They knew of only one unpardonable sin—to make what should be the end a means for the attainment of benefits, no matter how exalted and spiritual. They knew no spiritual cupboard-love, but cried out with St. Catherine of Genoa: "O Love, I do not wish to follow Thee for the sake of these delights, but solely from a motive of true love." [1] Their ofttimes horrible and even loathsome acts of mortification grew out of a single positive conviction, and not out of a theoretical denial of life, however strongly and inevitably they were influenced by the monastic theory and ideal. Their eyes were yielded to the Vision Beautiful. If an eye of flesh stood in the way of such seeing, what more natural and, in spite of the sharp pain, delightsome than to pluck it out, that the spiritual eye might be made keen to pierce the very stars? They would have gladly sung with their Eastern sister, Zeb-un-Nissa:

> "Like Yaqub, blinded by his agony,
> No face in all the world is aught to me:
> *What use have eyes, except to look on Thee?*" [2]

Or, if a greedy hand of earth contradict the heavenward gesture of the uplifted hand of the Spirit, what

[1] *Vita*, p. 8.
[2] *The Diwan of Zeb-un-Nissa*, p. 64.

more sensible and profitable than to cut if off? And if the rainbow-glass of natural life stain the white radiance of Eternity, what more sane and truly wise than to shatter it, even though the radiant vision still remain veiled?—for "God can never be sought in vain, not even when He cannot be found."[1] If His presence be felt only as a mist about the soul, what true lover would seek to exchange that dimness for the lights of an earthly home? In all the great mystic ascetics the cool and self-contained disinterestedness of the scientist is matched by the passionate and abandoned disinterestedness of the lover. "This monk," says Mr. Arthur Symons of St. John of the Cross, "can give lessons to lovers"; upon which Miss Underhill shrewdly remarks, "it would be strange if he could not."[2] Says Gertrude More, "To give all for love is a most sweet bargain," and again the Indian mystic supplies a parallel, as she exhorts the spiritually minded to a disinterestedness which is at once a longing for adventure and a great surrender of will:

"If perilous Love doth thee lead
If thou enter his track,
In the desert, like Majnun, thou dwell'st evermore,
Thou shalt never look back;
Nor even take heed
To thy life, if thou lose it or keep it, and pain
Shalt disdain;
Nor seek on the limitless ocean of love for a shore."[3]

[1] St. Bernard, *De Consideratione*, V., p. xi.
[2] *Mysticism*, p. 107.
[3] *The Diwan of Zeb-un-Nissa*, p. 40.

And while many of the manifestations of this at once adventurous and submissive spirit must needs repel us, and *ought* to repel us, we must not seek to disguise it from ourselves that very often our disapproval of their austerities has its root, not in a purified and Christianised doctrine of God's relation to His world, but in a characteristic cowardice and compromise; in—let us say it plainly—a failure to understand and an unwillingness to follow the way of the Cross. Very much has been made, for instance, of the "morbid" love of suffering which many mystics manifested. The heart of man, we say, is made for joy, and to crave suffering is a pathological symptom. But the mystics never craved suffering in the abstract. They saw their Lord on His Cross, and their warm, adoring love cried out, "Must Jesus bear the Cross alone? Let me suffer *with Him*, or not live." It is our departure from that passionate personal relation to Christ which makes it possible for us to misunderstand so simple and logical an attitude, and to magnify its occasional extravagant manifestations into symptoms of radical abnormality. We are quite prepared to give a more or less generous assent to the view of an Anglican theologian when he tells us that "the men of sorrows are the men of influence in every walk of life. Martyrdom is the certain road to success in any cause. Even more than knowledge, pain is power. And all this because it develops the latent capacities of our being as no other influence can."[1] With such a statement we have no quarrel. Its impersonal character and the stress it lays upon

[1] J. R. Illingworth, in *Lux Mundi* (10th ed.), p. 89.

the gains of suffering appeal to our temperament. But the mystic saints coveting pain, "not for the hope of gaining aught or seeking a reward," but simply and solely that they might be with Him and take their part in His sorrows, strike us as exotic and eccentric. Why? The reasonable objection that many of these saints were so busy in providing themselves with artificial means of hardship that they lost sight of the many opportunities of genuine and healthy self-denial which God had put into their daily lives is quite irrelevant here. It is the source and motive of asceticism, and not the form it may take in particular individuals and at different times, that we are concerned with. And if that source and motive belong to the things by which men in all ages live, then our true wisdom is to immerse ourselves in the lives and writings of men who, according to the knowledge and insight of their day and generation, were controlled and inspired by it, so that, perchance, we may recover it and translate its inspiration into the terms of our more liberal conceptions of life.

IV

Nor can it be said of the mystics that their asceticism was fundamentally external—a matter of fastings, scourgings, and hair-shirts. The ascetic literature of Mysticism is marked throughout by that inwardness which we imagine to be opposed to the monastic type, and is full of warnings against a misplaced confidence in external mortifications which leave the root of sin untouched. Two examples will

suffice. St. John of the Cross, in a passage too long to be quoted in full,[1] speaks of those who "think it enough to deny themselves in the things of this world, without annihilating themselves and purging away all self-seeking in spiritual things." Hence it comes to pass that when they are faced with "the nakedness of the spiritual poverty of Christ, they run away from it as from death itself. They seek only for delights, for sweet communications and satisfactions in God; but this is not self-denial nor detachment of spirit, but rather spiritual gluttony. They render themselves spiritually enemies of the Cross of Christ." Such an attitude, he says, is "perhaps nothing but to seek oneself in God, which is the very opposite of love." As an apt corollary to this, we may recall the searching words of Bishop Chandler: "God is called in that . . . our religious or philanthropic work may be carried forward and redound duly to our credit. God is to revolve diligently round us, supply certain needs and illuminate our piety and good works in the eyes of our fellow men. . . . The work for which we occasionally ask God's help is *ours*: we have chosen it; we are sure that it is good and that God will feel great pleasure in helping us to carry it out. . . . God is the means and we are the end." [2]

Our second example is taken from Ruysbroeck, who, at a time when chastity, even spiritual chastity, was primarily conceived in terms of the physical, discourses thus on this "evangelical counsel": "Chastity is an adhesion to God above intelligence and

[1] *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, I., p. xi.
[2] *The Cult of the Passing Moment*, pp. 117-118.

feeling, above all gifts which the soul is capable of receiving. . . . Chastity is *the splendour of the interior man* the power which closes the soul against the things of earth and opens it to those of Heaven. Chastity requires us to be armed with the weapons of Jesus, the Redeemer and Conqueror. It requires that His name be the joy of our hearts ; that we bear in our souls the resemblance of His life, the remembrance of . . . His humility, His passion, His blood poured forth. . . . Thus we must follow Him and kneel in spirit before the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. . . . There truth and justice will enlighten our spirit, and we shall shine brightly in the presence of God. The simple gaze must plunge and lose itself in the light in which the Divinity of Jesus Christ crowns the splendour of chastity. And in the Beatific Vision Jesus will clothe us with the robe of purity, which is Himself." [1]

But, we ask ourselves, do not this overwhelming emphasis upon the Cross and this obsession with the mortification of the self destroy the joyous simplicity of the Christian life ? To which it must be answered that there are two types of joyous simplicity—the viciously-acquired *naïveté* of the pious amateur and the deep gaiety of the soul that has come into the blithe garden of the Resurrection through the gateway of the Grave. "Rheinfried noticed how wonderfully the Cross was sculptured with a vine running up the shaft, and birds and small wild creatures among the vine-leaves," [2] says the legend, and the

[1] *Reflections from the Mirror of a Mystic*, pp. 49-51.
[2] William Canton, *A Child's Book of Saints*, pp. 49-51.

mystics have ever trained vines of joy round the tree of bitter pain, and peopled it with song birds of spiritual merriment. For they welcomed the Cross not for its own sake, but as a means of communion with Him who is the Lord of Joy. Here again they were sacramentarians. They venerated not the bitter "elements" of the Cross, but the sweetness of the Real Presence. Such souls do not fit into the framework of our blanched and mediocre life, with its conventional standards of pleasure and pain; but we cannot afford to forget that they are completely naturalised in the life which is mirrored for us in the New Testament. The disciples who, being called to suffer, "went rejoicing" would not have counted them abnormal; nor would St. Paul have discovered anything morbid in souls that found their joy in the strange and bitter adventure of the Cross.

It all turns upon our understanding of that Cross. We say it is opposed to Nature, and so it is, in one sense; in another it is surely the most "natural" thing in the world—that to which Nature tends, that which makes all creation agonise together, awaiting the consummated redemption of the sons of God. And even where we exalt the Cross, it is after a different manner from theirs. For to us it is often first and foremost the sign in which we are to conquer; to them it was the load under which they must fall to the earth. It was the shame, the indignity, the weakness, the failure, the dereliction of the Cross which they prized and sought, so that by any means they might be united to the Crucified. We glory in being adequate to our task through the Cross; they gloried

in a task to which they knew they must ever remain inadequate, and placed their sufficiency in One who sank crushed and bleeding beneath the very instrument of His triumph. They offered their souls to share the dark desolation of their "lovely Forerunner." True, they believed that gloom was but the "shade of His hand outstretched caressingly," but some of God's caresses leave wounds, and they did not flinch from that afflicting touch. Their spiritual treasure was stripped from them as a garment, love itself was inexplicably removed, hope died within them; only the naked intention of a surrendered will remained, only a dry and dumb faith waited blindly in the dark. So general was this experience among mystic saints that even so simple and sunny a soul as Mechthild of Magdeburg cries out, "Lord, since Thou hast taken from me all that I had of Thee, yet of Thy grace leave me the gift which every dog has by nature: that of being true to Thee in my distress when I am deprived of Thy consolation. This I desire more fervently than Thy heavenly Kingdom."[1] Or, again, the dereliction often took the less drastic form of spiritual dulness and languor—a paralysis of the emotions, an utter failure of the spiritual imagination. Even the sanguine and virile St. Teresa could only "cling" and persevere in prayer at such times.

It may be urged that such experiences are merely the inevitable reactions from supreme moments of vision, the penalty which the soaring spirit must pay for its hours of exaltation; and that therefore

[1] *Lux Divinitatis*, II., 25.

their significance is psychological rather than religious. But however frequently this may have been the case, it was not uniformly so, as many who experienced the "dark night" of dereliction were not of mercurial or romantic temperament, nor conspicuous for moments of clear vision. Moreover, even where the experience of dereliction is, in one of its aspects, susceptible of a psychological explanation, it is none the less a divine schooling in selfless constancy, a graduation in suffering love. And the point for emphasis is not at all that the mystics experienced these ebbings of Divine consolation, but that where we would chafe under them and all but demand a return of joy, vigour and effectiveness, they ate the bread of spiritual dryness and drank the cup of weakness with humble, uncomplaining love. They accepted frankly what we of to-day would evade or push aside; hence, by that strange paradox which is the very essence of Christianity, they fell heirs to a joy which we, who rush into the sunlit garden before we descend into the tenebrous grave, lack. And while we may turn with a certain sense of relief from these gaunt and weary Cross-bearers to the more congenial Nature and Love mystics, it is, as we shall note below, to the principle which animated the great ascetics that we shall have to return in essaying to suggest a mystical conception of Nature which shall be consonant with our present knowledge and view-point.

CHAPTER VIII

MYSTICISM AND NATURE: SYMBOLISM

"What!" it will be questioned, "when the sun rises, do you not see a round disc of fire, somewhat like a guinea?" Oh! no, no! I see an innumerable company of the heavenly host, crying, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty!" I question not my corporeal eye, any more than I would question a window concerning a sight. I look through it, and not with it.

WILLIAM BLAKE.

If the flesh owes all its beauty and vivacity, its love and sensibility to the infinite Spirit, we must not shrink from confessing the other half of the great mystery, that the infinite Spirit owes much to the flesh. He assumes the flesh for the manifestation of the hiddenmost, intensest affections of His nature.

JOHN PULSFORD.

All the world is secretly maddened by the mystery of love, and continually seeks its solution everywhere but where it is to be found.

COVENTRY PATMORE.

SYNOPSIS

Definition of symbolism—Dean Inge on false and true symbols—The symbol as Sacrament—Relation of Eucharist to Nature-Mysticism—The simplicity and suggestiveness of mystic symbolism—M. Récéjac on mystic symbols. I. Attempts to revive Franciscan Nature-Mysticism—Miss Underhill's directions to beginners in contemplation—Their spirit contrasted with that of St. Francis—The secret of the Franciscan genius. II. *Thomas Traherne*, Nature-mystic, philosopher, ascetic, and Love-mystic—His infant paradise—The unique quality of his Mysticism—His glorification of men—His delight in the world—His conception of the crucified Christ. III. *William Wordsworth*, his Nature-Mysticism, philosophy, and *askesis*—Wordsworth a true mystic—Professor A. C. Bradley on his visionary genius—His alleged lack of human sympathy—The Emersonian type. IV. *Coventry Patmore*—Traherne the link between Nature- and Love-mystics—Browning, Rossetti, Shelley, Keats, Francis Thompson—Coventry Patmore the supreme English exponent of Love-Mysticism—His spiritual eroticism—His doctrine of the ideal, unfulfilled marriage of man and woman—His respect for celibacy—His glorification of pure Love—His doctrine of a coming Bridal Dispensation—Man's soul the *sponsa Dei*. V. Neopagan delight in Nature—Dora Greenwell on Nature and Christ—Francis Thompson on paganism—"No heathen ever saw the same tree as Wordsworth"—Richard Jefferies' disillusionment—Nature not self-complete. VI. The pessimist's view of Nature as a cruel, anti-ethical force—Lotze's monadism—Father Tyrrell's warning—Nature includes man, but is not synonymous with spirit—The doctrine of Redemptive Creation—The value of asceticism—Man must stand outside Nature to possess it. VII. The ideal mystical attitude—The Sepulchre in the Garden—The Gardener—Religion must become natural—The mystic doctrine of temporal and eternal Nature—The Garden not an abode of selfish ease.

CHAPTER VIII

MYSTICISM AND NATURE: SYMBOLISM

FEW words have been so persistently misused as the word "symbol." In nine cases out of ten it is wrongly substituted for "emblem," and it recalls to most minds the quaint, conventional illustrations which adorn old editions of Quarles's *Emblems* and similar pious books of a bygone age, or the sentimental picture-language of the old-fashioned valentine or birthday-card. This double usage of the word for a merely conventional and a deeply sacramental correspondence has led some interpreters to deny that Mysticism is symbolic and others to affirm it. Dean Inge, in his exceedingly lucid and practical discussion of symbolism,[1] contends that while it is not easy to distinguish a merely conventional from a real affinity between a symbol and that which is symbolised, there are certain broad principles to guide us. Thus, "an aureole is not, properly speaking, a *symbol* of saintliness, nor a crown of royal authority, because in these instances the connection of sign with significance is conventional; . . . but falling leaves are a symbol of human mortality, a flowing river of the 'stream' of life, and a vine and its branches of the unity of Christ and the Church, because they are examples of the same law which operates through all

[1] *Christian Mysticism*, pp. 250-261.

that God has made." [1] This, however, hardly meets the whole case. For a true symbol must not merely be a natural, as distinct from an arbitrary, illustration or exemplification of the thing signified ; it must also be its vehicle and medium—it must *convey* as well as illuminate. Goethe's definition of true symbolism as that in which " the more particular represents the more general, not as a dream or shade, but as a vivid, instantaneous revelation of the inscrutable," [2] comes nearer the mark, but is too exclusively intellectual to cover the whole meaning. A far more adequate and comprehensive conception is reached when we substitute " sacrament " for " symbol." A sacrament is not only an external expression of a spiritual reality, but also its vehicle. Dean Inge forcibly points out what is constantly overlooked by writers on symbolism, that both the superstitious and materialistic view of sacraments, which makes them miracles or magical performances, and the rationalist view, which reduces them to mere commemorative emblems, are alike destructive of the idea of a sacrament. A little common sense would save us from much confusion at this point. If we turn away from sacraments in the specific and ecclesiastical sense, and turn to such a channel of grace as the atmosphere and influence of a Christian home, we at once perceive how fatal both the magical and the rationalist interpretations are to the sacramental idea. The ministrations of Christian family life, as they come to the children of such a home, through example, through an

[1] *Christian Mysticism*, p. 251.
[2] Quoted by Dean Inge in *Christian Mysticism*, p. 251 (note).

atmosphere of integrity, helpfulness and affection, and through verbal precept and common prayer and worship, convey something to these children which could come to them in no other way, and the lack of which leaves a mark for life upon those who are deprived of it. In other words, it is not merely an arbitrary emblem of the fatherly nurture of God for which any other illustration may be substituted, but it has a real and vital relation to that which it not only reveals but effectually conveys. On the other hand, the very word "convey" excludes the idea of anything like a magical transference or transubstantiation—as if, in the act of family priesthood, the Christian father or mother were lost in the immediate and miraculously substituted presence of God Himself.

True symbolism, then, is communion with God by means of "outward signs" which are vital expressions and natural vehicles of the Divine. In this sense, all valid dogmatic theology is the dialectical development of mystical symbols of which the Trinity is the most influential and germinal.[1] The great mystics are essentially sacramentalists; and of by far the greater majority it may be said that their sacramental outlook upon Nature and life is rooted in their worshipful acceptance of the sacraments of the Church. It was the Eucharist which taught the elect among mediæval saints to make a sacrament of every common meal. It was their assimilation of the very "substance" of Christ at the Lord's Table which made the wisest of them so eager to feed on Nature, transub-

[1] *Cf.* Récéjac, *Essay on the Bases of the Mystic Knowledge*, p. 137.

stantiating her " elements " by the alchemy of faith into the very stuff of eternal life. Sacramentarianism, even in the gross, materialised form to which it was degraded in the Middle Ages, was a schoolmaster to bring holy souls to an understanding of the sacramental value of Nature and of human love. All Nature-Mysticism and all true Love-Mysticism are a necessary corollary to the *Hoc est corpus meum* of the Eucharist.

Genuine Mysticism, then, is symbolic, in the sense of being sacramental, and not after the fanciful manner of a conventional and arbitrary typology, nor after the sophisticated manner of certain types of poetry. The symbolism of the great mystics is " not merely a legitimate but a *necessary* mode of intuition." [1] And while it is not always safe to lay claim to the gift of discerning the spirits, genuine symbols are, broadly speaking, distinguished from the artificial type by their simplicity and their extraordinary power of suggestion. One need only lay one of the great prophetic visions of Scripture—*e.g.*, that of Isaiah or Elijah—beside some of the more ornate and intricate work of Francis Thompson to realise this. The modern poet's symbolism is entirely valid in its own sphere : it is neither meretricious nor insincere ; but it needs laborious translation, it lacks the vital, immediate and potent suggestiveness of the simple symbolism of Biblical prophecy. It is " produced," not " given " ; it illustrates, but does not mediate and convey ; it is the special property of the poetic genius, not the potential heritage of the human heart

[1] Inge, *Christian Mysticism*, p. 252.

athirst for God. M. Récéjac, whose Kantian standpoint makes his interpretation of Mysticism all the more valuable, gives noble expression to this conviction when he reminds us that "the most perfect notion of God which has ever been conceived is 'the Being forever communicating Its own essence.' By it we have authority to believe that the symbols under which God really gives Himself, and which are more interior than any other sort of mental image, may arise in every sincere human consciousness." [1]

I

Nature-Mysticism is very much in the air at the present time, and we are even being provided with elaborate and, it must be confessed, alarming instructions on the best way to become Nature-mystics ourselves. From such counsels one instinctively retreats upon the winsome picture of little St. Francis among his birds and beasts, and falls to wondering at the extraordinary futility and sophistication of modern attempts to recapture the Franciscan spirit. Truth is, St. Francis was an ascetic saint as well as a Nature-mystic; and while his natural genius made him a master where others are mere imitators and *dilettanti*, his deepest appreciations of Nature were the direct outcome of his Christian discipleship, of the purged and radiant perception of a soul that bore the Stigmata. The same might be said of St. Rose of Lima. It was ultimately the nail-pierced hand of Christ that re-created the world for them, and that is why their

[1] *Essay on the Bases of the Mystic Knowledge*, pp. 144-145.

relation to Nature was distinguished by a directness and spontaneousness beside which the best so-called Nature-poetry seems artificial and sophisticated—a relation which transcended even the highest type of reflective meditation. That identification of the soul with its object towards which poets and artists aspire and which is the dream of the philosopher is perfectly realised in the simplicity of a St. Francis, whose candid, love-lit eyes see everything " in God " and therefore in a true and vital unity. There is no abstraction, no deliberate immersion of the self into Nature. There is only the eye which God has lightened, looking at its Maker and at everything in the unity of His redeeming love. Well might Madame Arvède Barine say that the *plaisir égoiste* of the *dilettante* found no foothold in the soul of St. Francis. To him the birds were not " symbols " in the sense of being parables which had to be translated laboriously into terms of spirit. They had for him their positive value, their inalienable place, in God's Kingdom of Love.

The distinguishing quality of the Franciscan vision of Nature emerges most clearly when we compare it with certain directions for elementary contemplation given by Miss Underhill.[1] Contemplation, she says, must begin with " the discovery of God in His creatures," and self must be pushed back, till we find in every manifestation of life—even in those we have " petulantly classified as cruel or obscene "—the " ardent self-expression " of the Immanent God. It is the attitude of deliberate and self-forgetful attentiveness that matters, and not the nature of the

[1] *Practical Mysticism*, pp. 89-93.

object contemplated. "Look," she tells us, "with the eye of contemplation on the most dissipated tabby of the streets, and you shall discern the celestial quality of life set like an aureole about his tattered ears, and hear in his strident mew an echo of

> "'The deep, enthusiastic joy,
> The rapture of the hallelujah sent
> From all that breathes and is.'

The sooty tree up which he scrambles to escape your earnest gaze is holy too."

Quite apart from the curious lack of humour which such a passage betrays, and the fundamentally un-Christian and unethical conception of God which underlies its indifference as to the object of contemplation, nothing could be farther from the genius and quality of the Franciscan love of Nature which Miss Underhill claims as her model. St. Francis did *not* deliberately sit down to "contemplate" Nature in order to discover God. God came to him, as to most Christian mystics, through definite moral and spiritual experiences, clear calls to heroic service, solemn revealings of sinfulness and of the grace that redeems, dynamic visions of a personal Lord and King. We could not imagine him setting himself to fix a contemplative eye upon a "tabby" or any other creature—possibly that was one of the reasons why no living thing ever scrambled up a tree "to escape his earnest gaze." He had seen God, and his natural endowment helped him to see every living creature, not equally beautiful and divine, as our unethical pseudo-Mysticism has it, but dear and beloved in God.

This is not to deny that the " creatures " may lead the human soul to God, and that many a modern mystic has found his true kingdom through " a little feathered brother." [1] But it remains that to sit down deliberately to discover God by gazing with selfless attention at cats, or Alps, or insects, is a species of devout sophistication which strikes a false note to the ear that is attuned to the voice of Jesus and to the lyric strain of St. Francis. The healing and purifying power of Nature is not in question here, nor the soundness of the instinct which sends the worker and seeker who is tired of the world's conventional platitudes and fussy activities to her beneficent bosom. But when writers like Miss Underhill recommend a deliberate course of contemplation of cats, or trees, or any other manifestation of life, however cruel or obscene they may appear, as a means to the discovery of God, we have passed from the authentic to the factitious. Between the true mystic's sympathy with Nature and all such deliberate cults there is a great gulf fixed. St. Francis was the greatest Nature-mystic simply because he was not primarily a Nature-mystic at all. He saw a Cross in the heavens; he felt the nails in his soul; he surrendered beauty as well as wealth in the great self-stripping. And so the fair, green earth, which he had counted a " world well lost " that he might win Christ, fell into his hand like a magic apple; and he possessed it as the Greek soul, intoxicated with the rhythm of passing things, had never possessed it.

[1] *Cf. A Modern Mystic's Way*, chap. i.

II

If St. Francis links Nature-Mysticism to asceticism, Thomas Traherne, also an ascetic, though of a widely different type, and a philosopher to boot, links it to Love-Mysticism. It seems a far cry from the lyric spontaneity of St. Francis to the meditative habit and profoundly reflective insight of Traherne; yet the affinities between them are greater than their differences. Traherne was born a Franciscan, and remained a Franciscan, until, at the mature age of four (!), the fact that all men were bent upon material success and happiness, and that the felicity of attaining it was given only to the few, suggested a doubt as to the goodness of God. Of his infant paradise he writes with curious and immortal charm: "All appeared new, and strange at first, inexpressibly rare and delightful and beautiful. I was a little stranger, which at my entrance into the world was saluted and surrounded with innumerable joys. . . . The corn was orient and immortal wheat which never should be reaped nor was ever sown. I thought it had stood from everlasting to everlasting. The dust and stones of the street were as precious as gold: the gates were at first the end of the world. The green trees when I saw them first . . . transported and ravished me, their sweetness and unusual beauty made my heart to leap, and almost mad with ecstasy, they were such strange and wonderful things. The men! O what venerable and reverend creatures did the aged seem! Immortal cherubims! And young men glittering and sparkling angels, and maids,

strange seraphic pieces of life and beauty! Boys and girls tumbling in the street and playing were moving jewels. I knew not they were born or should die; but all things abided eternally as they were in their proper places. The city seemed to stand in Eden, or to be built in heaven." [1]

Only by degrees was that dewy radiance tarnished by the influence of those who at last persuaded him that "a drum, a fine coat, a penny, a gilded book" were to be prized. It was not until he had passed through Oxford and been appointed to his quiet country living, that the heaven that had lain about him in his infancy was reopened in deeper and even more glorious fashion to his manhood's sight. Spending no more than ten pounds a year, feeding on bread and water, and, like George Fox, wearing a suit of leather he found happiness in "a free and kingly life, as if the world were turned again into Eden, or much more." [2] In the case of St. Francis, an innate sympathy with Nature was refined and transmuted by the unreserved surrender of his whole being to the severe alchemy of the Cross into something every whit as naïve and simple yet deep as life itself. In the case of Traherne, a long process of reflective brooding resulted in an attitude towards Nature in which the lovable freshness of childhood blended with the mellow maturity of a patiently cultivated mind—a remarkable combination of the intuitive and the intellectual, the æsthetic and the ethical, which has no parallel in the history of Mysticism. Mr. W. K. Fleming justly observes

[1] *Centuries of Meditation*, pp. 156-158.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 194.

that in reading Traherne's meditations we "take a fresh breath, rub our eyes and get our gratitude newly back again, as if indeed we were abroad with him on some sunlit down, seeing with him God's grace in every 'spire of grass' and in his 'orient and immortal wheat.'" [1] For Traherne, as for St. Francis, God has recreated the earth, but his philosophical bent, and also his religious training and conviction, allowed him to discern and emphasise the human factor in this re-creative act. He saw man so wonderfully made in the image of God as to be capable not only of understanding but of transmuting and, as it were, re-creating God's universe, and by this creative insight adding a new and precious element to the world, glorifying what was already glorious. Thus he says, "You never enjoy the world aright till the sea itself floweth in your veins, till you are clothed with the heavens and crowned with the stars. . . . Till you can sing and rejoice and delight in God, as misers do in gold, and kings in sceptres, you never enjoy the world. . . . The world is a mirror of infinite beauty, yet no man sees it. It is a temple of majesty, yet no man regards it. . . . It is the Paradise of God. . . . It is the place of angels and the Gate of Heaven." [2]

Traherne was, in his own quiet, brooding fashion, an "enjoying" soul. He saw God ever desiring, ever pleading for the responsive love of the souls which He had made; and he saw the heart of man so urgent in its cry for love, so clamant in its craving for

[1] *Mysticism in Christianity*, p. 193.
[2] *Centuries of Meditation*, pp. 20-21.

joy, that to him the communion of the soul with God was as the meeting of two great wants, the passionate confluence of two rivers of desire.[1] His delight in a universe which met the myriad wants of the insatiable human heart with such divine opulence stands in some contrast to the more modest satisfaction and undemanding contentment of St. Francis among his birds and beasts. Beside its vigour and opulence, the chastened mirth of the little brother of the poor seems as a crayon drawing beside an oil painting. No less salient is the contrast when we set the homely Franciscan wisdom, with its ascetic prohibition of learning and the possession of books, beside the intellectual magnificence of Traherne, who brought his Platonic inheritance and his liberal learning to the altar of God. Yet the two meet at the central point: both derived what was deepest and most fruitful in their appreciation of Nature from the Cross of Christ. The philosophical divine no less than the simple-hearted friar learnt to love sun and stars, the birds, and the humble grass in the school of the Cross.

To Traherne, living in a calmer and clearer atmosphere than that in which St. Francis wore out his suffering frame, it was given to discern and celebrate the glory which lay hidden in the wounds and bitter agony of the Cross of Jesus. His delight it was to re-live all the august and delightsome happenings of sacred history, but, above all, the Saviour's Cross was to him "the throne of delights, that centre of eternity, that tree of life in the midst of the Paradise of God."[2]

[1] *Centuries of Meditation*, p. 34: "Wants are the bands and cements between God and us," etc.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 39.

In a passage which parallels his eulogium of the world, he extols the Cross as "the abyss of wonders, the centre of desires, the school of virtues, the house of wisdom, the throne of love, the theatre of joys and the place of sorrows." [1] He sees it as "a tree set on fire with invisible flame, that illuminateth all the world," [2] the flame of the Love of Him who died upon it; and he sees in the dying Victim the Conqueror and Heir of the whole world. Thus he says, in one of his most genuinely mystical utterances, "To this poor, bleeding, naked Man did all the corn and wine and oil and gold and silver in the world minister in an invisible manner, even as He was exposed lying and dying upon the Cross." [3]

Nor was he merely a spectator in the face of the Divine Passion. The sight of Jesus crucified moves his dignified and fastidious pen to words which we are accustomed to connect with the crude, emotional outbursts of popular Catholic piety. "O my life and my all," he exclaims, "I beseech Thee, let those trickling drops of blood that ran down Thy flesh drop upon me. O let Thy love enflame me. . . . O Thou that redeemed me from hell. . . . What shall I do unto Thee? What shall I do for Thee . . .? O Let me this day see Thee and be united to Thee in Thy holy sufferings. . . . I pray Thee, teach me first Thy love unto me and then unto mankind." [4] It is sometimes remarked that the difference between the Nature-mysticism of Traherne and that of St. Francis

[1] *Centuries of Meditation*, p. 41.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 43.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 43.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 44.

is that for Traherne the Crucified is pre-eminently the Opener and Restorer of the earthly paradise to man, whereas for St. Francis He is the Lord and Lover of his soul, by whose death the world is crucified unto him and he to the world. But while there is a degree of truth in this view, words such as those quoted above show how greatly it needs to be modified. And such outbursts of adoring love are by no means unusual with Traherne. "Thou wast slain for me," he says elsewhere, "and shall I leave Thy Body in the field, O Lord? Shall I go away and be merry, while the Love of my soul and my only Lover is dead upon the Cross?"[1] And again, "By descending into hell for the sake of others, let me ascend into the glory of the highest heavens. Let the fidelity and efficacy of my love appear in all my care and suffering for Thee."[2] With him, as with St. Francis, Love is the root and crown of vision; but while in St. Francis the conception of Love is determined by the monastic ideal, Traherne's conception links him to a class of mystics whose theological (and in many cases anti-theological) presuppositions are widely removed from his own—the so-called Love-mystics. His type is, as we have seen, remarkably complex, for all its translucent candour. In him the flower of childlike delight blossoms on the stem of philosophic reflection, and an acute and refined sensibility to beauty flows out of the adoration of the naked Cross. He shows how a deep and loving contemplation of God and Nature can make all human loving, not to pale and

[1] *Centuries of Meditation*, p. 68. *Cf.* Richard Rolle's homely saying "My Dear-worthy Lord hanged on the Rood, and I lie in this soft bed!"

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 69.

take on the hue of sin, but to shine with the flame-like splendour of a divine passion. Traherne, indeed, more than almost any other mystic, has equally deep affinities with each of the four classes.

III

We instinctively turn to Wordsworth for the classic instance of pure Nature-Mysticism, in the modern sense of the word, but in his case, too, the conventional classification breaks down, and we find him to be as much a philosophical mystic as a Nature-mystic, and, like most philosophical mystics, informed with a wisely ascetic spirit. He is Greek by temperamental affinity, more especially in his dislike of fervid emotions and his dominating sense of harmony and wholeness. For him purgation consists in the avoidance of everything that can impair a serene detachment and untroubled clarity of mind, and, on the intellectual side, in the pruning away of habits of loose analogy, blurred distinctions, and false symbolisms. An intellectual contemplative, his most exalted visions are the outcome of reflection, *i.e.*, his intuitions come to him, for the most part, not as forerunners of thought, but as the crown and fruition of long reflective processes. His fundamental doctrine is that God speaks not in Nature only, nor in the human soul only, but in both; and that it is to the soul in the act of communion with Nature that the deepest revelations are vouchsafed. Such revelations are the fruit of the marriage of the *intellect* of man (including the imagination, which is "Reason in her

most exalted mood,") to "this goodly universe, in love and holy passion." They convey at once a sense of that infinitude and eternity which are our home and a sense of the depth of the hidden self—the twin fruit, as we have seen already, of mystic introversion. The final term of such experiences is the ability "to breathe in worlds to which the heaven of heavens is but a veil," and to perceive "the forms whose kingdom is where time and space are not"; in other words, Contemplation and Ecstasy. The poet's one object is to possess "the eye made quiet by the power of harmony and the deep power of joy"; to achieve that "wise passiveness" and fruitful equilibrium in which the soul "sees into the life of things."

A superficial view of Wordsworth, influenced largely by Matthew Arnold's famous essay, denies to him a place among the mystics. It pictures him as a calm, serene, somewhat phlegmatic person, of intermittent and not particularly virile inspiration, and innocent of any excess of human sympathy—a mildly meditative soul, in short, who found a certain quiet and sober joy in contemplating the sweet and homely things of Nature, and who did his best to induce others to make trial of this placid form of simple life. As a matter of fact, however, his was a soul of fire, in which strong passions intertwined and struggled like shooting flames—passions which, by dint of a long, sharp discipline, he had learnt to keep in wise and stern control and guide into beneficent channels. His was the thinker's subtle mind and the seer's darting apprehension. The passions which he held in such

perfect and abiding control were turned from flaring torches into a white and steady flame which transmuted and welded the raw material of his emotions into the fine and pellucid stuff of vision. His was no provincial or domestic eye with a fondness for insignificant detail. He was primarily concerned, not with beautiful things, but with the life that runs through the whole; not with the fair flesh of Nature, but with the soul that shines through it. An inspiration so high and rare could not be constant, and it needed the protecting screen of an apparently phlegmatic habit to guard the body against the consuming fire of the soul.

Above all, he was a mystic of the high and imperious type of Plotinus—one who, like Blake, made inspiration and vision his eternal dwelling-place, and ever discerned "the outward-flowering of Eternity in the delicate living forms of time." As Professor A. C. Bradley has pointed out, he ever felt the presence of mysterious, inviolable powers, and was, in the deepest and most honourable sense, a visionary for whom all Nature was one great "deep door" into the Infinite; for whom every highway disappearing in the blue distance

> "Was like an invitation into space
> Boundless, or guide into Eternity."

So far from being the poet of the primrose hedge and the country cottage, he was pre-eminently the poet of the mountain solitude, of the great, pregnant stillness where unspoken things lie warm, of the mysterious, silent spaces where everything is natural yet

everything is apocalyptic. True, he always had a humble and attentive mind for small and lowly things. A bird's note upon the still air, a girl's song, the appearance of a peasant child, the faint spark of a glow-worm, the sight of a flower in the grass—in all these he found nurture and inspiration. But each of these in his hands became an intimation of the great Life that pulses through all; a revelation of some unguessed grace; a hint of boundlessness beyond. His was the "inseeing" eye, and it is by the flash of vision, not by the quiet browsing of observation, that he is a great poet. To excise the visionary element out of his poetry would be to leave him "shorn of his strength," indeed. His Mysticism was not the outcome of his philosophic pondering, still less an accidental and negligible mood. It was the inborn *habitus* of his soul. In the words of Professor Bradley, "he saw everything in the light of 'the visionary power.' . . . He apprehended all things, natural or human, as an expression of something which, while manifested in them, immeasurably transcended them. And nothing can be more intensely Wordsworthian than the poems and passages most marked by this visionary power and most directly issuing from this apprehension." [1]

Mystics of Wordsworth's serene and detached type have always been accused of a somewhat shallow and facile optimism which cannot, or will not, see the brutal and tragic aspects of Nature. With this objection we shall deal more fully further on. Meanwhile it is sufficient to note that Nature can no

[1] *Oxford Lectures on Poetry*, pp. 126-127.

longer be regarded as merely "red in tooth and claw with ravine." Nature includes man as well as beast, and manifests mercy as well as cruelty, gives ground for a valid optimism as well as for a wholesome pessimism. And if the discovery of these opposing tendencies in Nature paralyses the uninspired observer into an attitude of blank agnosticism, it evokes in the seeing soul a vision of inworking grace, and a sure and certain expectation of consummated glory. For to such it is the good and beautiful within Nature which is most natural, and therefore destined to final triumph.

A more defensible charge levelled against mystics of this type is their lack of warm human sympathy. We know it to be true of Wordsworth that "his soul was like a star and dwelt apart," and a sound instinct tells us that such detachment, however lofty, misses true greatness; that such tranquillity, however stainless, is of another perfection than that with which our Father in Heaven is perfect. Wordsworth himself, indeed, confessed that in his earlier days he preferred hills and streams to human kind,[1] and even when through Nature he came to a more tender and wise understanding of man, it was to man as a unity that his spirit was drawn, and not to the world of concrete, individual human beings.[2] This, to the Christian heart at any rate, is the blind spot that dims the eye of many mystics; and yet even here we must qualify our criticism. In common with most mystics of his type, Wordsworth did cultivate a pro-

[1] *Prelude*, viii.
[2] *Ibid.*

found and intimate acquaintance with one individual —himself. Much has been said concerning the viciousness of a preoccupation with self-culture, yet it remains that the man who engages in a humble and rigorous self-discipline is, by that much, in genuine and vital, if severely limited, touch with humanity; whereas many a person whose cheap philanthropies gain him a reputation for breadth of human sympathy does not genuinely touch humanity at even a single point. The man who works at himself, always provided his motive be noble, sanctifies himself for the sake of his brethren; while he who remains a stranger to himself on the plea of a feeling for humanity which exhausts itself in a small, cheap concern about other people serves neither himself nor his fellows.

Even in the case of so provoking and all-but-exasperating a soul as Emerson this holds true. Emerson deliberately turned his back upon human sin and pain, and selfishly refused to let his eyes rest upon ugliness, deformity, or disease. Yet he, too, was pledged to a noble *askesis*, and, as Dean Inge reminds us, his beautiful character was as noble a gift to humanity as his writings. To keep one's mind undeviatingly fixed upon whatsoever things are pure, lovely, and of good report is not a "soft" or easy business; and the soul that persists in such endeavour has made more real contact with humanity than could be made through a thousand so-called acts of mercy in which the personality is not really involved. The ideal Christian mystic is, of course, one who is a true priest and pastor of humanity as well as a philosopher and a seer, and who combines the noble,

shepherdly heart with a clear and radiant wisdom. For a Nature-mystic exhibiting such a combination we must turn back to Traherne, who, while ever caught in the enchantment of a world made new, whose beautiful and mysterious life invited his most absorbed and exalted attention, went about his country parish, seeing the passion of Christ in every eye and treating every one he met "in the person of Christ."

With Wordsworth we may close our brief analysis of typical Nature-mystics, leaving many interesting personalities such as Blake untouched. Wordsworth, like Traherne, though in a widely different way, has affinities with both the ascetic and the philosophical mystics, and may be cited as the exemplar of an *askesis* which does not seek to suppress but to control.

IV

Traherne, as we have seen, forms a link between the Nature-mystics and the great Love-mystics. For him, love is the centre of the universe, and "the most delightful and natural employment of the soul of man." "By loving," he says, "the soul doth propagate and beget itself."[1] And again, "When you love men, the world quickly becometh yours; and yourself becomes a greater treasure than the world is. . . . You are as prone to love as the sun is to shine. . . . By love our souls are married and soldered to the creatures; and it is our duty like God to be united to them all."[2] So far he is in agreement

[1] *Centuries of Meditation*, p. 120.
[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 124-125.

with the great ascetics who were at the same time apostles of love. The passages quoted are of a piece with Mechthild of Magdeburg's "Who so knows and loves the nobleness of My freedom cannot bear to love Me alone, but must also love Me in the creatures";[1] for in Traherne, too, the love of mankind is the direct and logical outcome of the love of God. But Traherne, who, as a Protestant, was not cut off from domestic life as most of the mediæval mystics were, goes further and, in at least one passage, flings a bridge across the chasm between the mediæval and the modern ideals of love. "Supposing a curious and fair woman," he says. "Some have seen the beauties of Heaven in such a person. It is a vain thing to say they loved too much. I dare say there are ten thousand beauties in that creature which they have not seen. They loved it not too much, but upon false causes. Nor so much upon false ones; as only upon some little ones. They love a creature for sparkling eyes and curled hair, lily breasts and ruddy cheeks: which they should love, moreover, for being God's Image, Queen of the Universe, . . . a mine and fountain of all virtues, a treasury of graces and a child of God. . . . I dare confidently say that every person in the whole world ought to be beloved as much as this; and she, if there be any cause of difference, *more* than she is."[2]

For examples of pure Love-Mysticism we must turn to Browning, Rossetti, and, most of all, to Coventry Patmore, the supreme English exponent of the sacra-

[1] *Lux Divinitatis*, vi, 4.
[2] *Centuries of Meditation*, pp. 126-127.

ment of love. In Blake and Shelley, Love-Mysticism has a subordinate place, while in Keats we have the pagan and philosophic counterpart of the monastic attitude. "The mighty abstract idea I have of Beauty in all things stifles the more divided and minute domestic happiness," [1] he writes; and if he is keenly sensitive to "the charm of women," it is not to women as such, but to the eternal essence—"the lovely moon"—of which their charm is but one manifestation. Francis Thompson also, though in quite another sense, stopped short of being a typical Love-mystic. Of genuine Love-Mysticism there is enough in his poetry, and his sense of the divinity in woman's beauty is summed up in the well-known lines, "Domus Tua":

> "A perfect woman—Thine be laud!
> Her body is a Temple of God:
> At Doom-bar dare I make avows,
> I have loved the beauty of Thy house."

Yet human love is, in most of his work, a symbol, in the narrower sense, rather than a sacrament; a medium of revelation, not a vehicle of grace.

Passing by Browning, whose philosophy of life is too well known to justify fresh exposition, and Rossetti, who in his early prose romance, *Hand and Soul*, made a glorious promise destined to remain unfulfilled, we come to the most explicit of Love-mystics, Coventry Patmore. Elizabethan in feeling and rhythm, Early-mediæval in his essential Catholicism, Patmore was a curious and baffling mixture, and we can readily understand how ill he fitted into the frame-

[1] In a letter to his brother George.

work, not only of Victorian conventionality, but also of Victorian idealism. He was at once a materialist and a mystic, an egoist and a devotee, a sentimentalist and a realist, a voluptuary and a puritan. He sinned grossly in many of his poems against the decencies of emotion, yet the final effect was generally that of a high and pure austerity. His philosophy makes an equal appeal to the Catholic and to the Protestant mystic, his conception of the "nuptial" relation between God and the soul being, of course, most congenial to Catholic, and his glorification of marriage to Protestant, feeling. What seems a curious contradiction to Protestant minds is the fact that while he exalts marriage to the utmost limit of wholesome idealisation, he has no contempt, but, on the contrary, the highest respect, for the typically monastic habit of applying the language of married love to the "spiritual nuptials" between God and the soul of the celibate contemplative. His philosophy of love serves the purpose of a wholesome antidote to the modern recoil from anything like an "erotic" conception of the commerce between the soul and its God. It is quite obvious that in many individual cases enforced celibacy resulted in a transference to the human person of Christ of feelings which were denied their legitimate outlet, and that such a cult led to a religious amorousness, not only strongly repellent to the healthy spiritual instinct, but also fraught with grave moral peril. So closely are flesh and spirit intertangled in the web of our humanity that the flesh may actually feed and grow rampant upon the fervour of the spirit and, in the end, take terrible

revenge. But such indisputable truisms do not dispose of the subject. In approaching what is termed erotic Mysticism as exemplified, for instance, in the mystical interpretation of the Song of Solomon, the fundamental question is not whether the language is nauseatingly amorous, or whether the whole procedure is brimful of danger, but whether it corresponds to any genuine need and instinct of the soul and to any reality in God.

Now Coventry Patmore recalls us, in more convincing accents than any other modern mystic, to the fact that behind the unhealthiness and the ofttimes painful immodesty which disfigure so much of erotic Mysticism there lies the simple truth that love between man and woman is the sacrament of that great mystery which is the "burning heart" and "celestial decorum" of the universe. He insists with compelling power that not earthly but heavenly marriage is the original. In applying the language of earthly love to the soul's communion with God we are not dealing in an alien and questionable terminology, but speaking in the very mother-tongue of the Spirit: it is when we apply it to *human* marriage that we translate. No abuse, therefore, nor any lurking danger need deter us from speaking of God and the soul in terms which were coined in Heaven to fit that supreme relationship before ever they were borrowed on earth to glorify its human symbol. When men and women in moments of humble insight know themselves unworthy to be loved they bow, not merely before the mystery of a love which earthly marriage can consummate, but before the perceived reality of that unful-

filled marriage of which their union is but the shadow. "God," he asserts in a highly mystical passage, "has declared to us His mystic rapture in His Marriage with Humanity in twice saying, *Hic est Filius meus dilectus in quo bene complaceo.* He expressly and repeatedly calls this marriage, and pronounces the marriage of man and woman to be its symbol." [1] And again, in one of his most characteristic passages, "Nothing more clearly proves that love between man and woman is 'a great sacrament' than the sense of infinite non-desert and infinite poverty of capacity for its whole felicity, which those who are most deserving and most capable of its joy feel in the presence of its mysteries. From this sense of incapacity for an infinite honour and felicity proceeds the tender passion of refusal which is the first motion of perfect love, and which it would be adultery to feel towards more than one. The lower love, being the sacrament and substantial shadow of the higher—for in divine things shadows are substances—is, no less than the higher, ineffable and beyond analysis." [2] For Patmore the marriage bond is essentially spiritual. "Lover and mistress," he says, "become sensibly one flesh in the instant that they confess to one another a full and mutual complacency of intellect, will, affection and sense, with the promise of inviolable faith. *That* is the moment of fruition." [3]

It is characteristic of Patmore's Catholicism that his high valuation of marriage does not make

[1] *The Rod, the Root, and the Flower:* "Aphorisms," p. 216.
[2] *Ibid.*, "Homo," VI.
[3] *Ibid.*, "Magna Moralia," V.

him contemptuous of the voluntary celibate. Thus he says of the monastic saint that "he who bears the flag is most the soldier though he does not fight. And he who nobly upholds the honour for which man is procreated helps as much as any in the conservation of the race."[1] This double appreciation is exquisitely expressed in his poem, "Deliciæ Sapientiæ de Amore," where all who love purely are invited to assist at the Marriage-feast of heaven, and to

> "hear
> Them singing clear
> '*Cor meum et caro mea*' round the 'I am,'
> The Husband of the Heavens, and the Lamb."

Not only virgins are called to gaze with unveiled eyes upon the ineffable Purity, but all who followed Love with clean intent:

> "Gaze and be not afraid,
> Ye wedded few, that honour in sweet thought
> And glittering will . . .
> For ye, though self-suspected here for nought,
> Are highly styled
> With the thousands twelve times twelve of undefiled.
> Gaze and be not afraid,
> Young Lover true, and love-foreboding Maid . . .
> Gaze without blame,
> Ye in whom living Love yet blushes for dead shame;
> There of pure Virgins none
> Is fairer seen,
> Save One,
> Than Mary Magdalene.

[1] *The Rod, the Root, and the Flower:* "Aphorisms," p. 234.

Gaze without doubt or fear,
Ye to whom generous Love, by any name, is dear.
Love makes the life to be
A fount perpetual of virginity
For, lo, the Elect
Of generous Love, how named soe'er, affect
Nothing but God,
Or mediate or direct
Nothing but God,
The Husband of the Heavens:
And who Him love, in potence great or small,
Are, one and all,
Heirs of the Palace glad,
And inly clad
With the bridal robes of ardour virginal."

In somewhat striking affinity with John Pulsford, Patmore maintains that, in the gradual emergence of a new order of humanity which will unhesitatingly, wholly and unconditionally present body as well as soul to God, a *bridal* dispensation will take the place of the filial. "Under the first dispensation," he says, "men were the servants of God, under the second His sons; what if under a third 'the voice of the Bride and the Bridegroom be heard again in our streets?'"[1] No gospel can finally satisfy humanity but one which brings it "with gladness and rejoicing" to the house of marriage where Wisdom pours the wine of joy and furnishes the table with every meat that can delight and exhilarate, where it is summer in the soul, and the slumbering bridal germs of our nature are quickened and we know our Divine Lover. In common with all wise Love-

[1] *Religio Poetæ*, p. 225.

mystics, Patmore is careful to point out that a profane anticipation of these delights spells moral suicide, and that filial fear still remains "the prudence of the saints." It is not holy prudence, however, but base contentment and craven indolence that restrain our hearts from inditing a good matter, and seeing, though it be as from afar, the King greatly desiring the beauty of the Bride, arrayed in clothing of wrought gold.

And we may well suspect that if the Bridegroom tarrieth, it is because we are too enslaved by tradition, and too unsimple and unventuresome to yield Him our whole humanity, body and soul, saying, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to Thy Word. "Every man's soul," says Patmore "is as a woman before God"; and in his view a religion which, in the interests of a supposed virility, suppresses the yearning receptivity of the *sponsa Dei*, so far from being "manly" is not even human. Only the weak need to suppress and deny their tenderest instincts: the strong man has so perfect, easy, and abiding a control of all his senses and emotions that he can afford to do justice to the feminine factor which is always most pronounced in truly virile natures.[1]

[1] Patmore has treated of this aspect of the mystic marriage between Divinity and Humanity with matchless power in his odes, "The Unknown Eros," "Eros and Psyche," "De Natura Deorum," and "Sponsa Dei." For sheer splendour of spiritual passion and austerity they stand unrivalled in literature, combining sensuous beauty and flaming ardour with a certain deep and impassable discretion. In a book, *Sponsa Dei*, which he burnt, feeling the world was not ready for it, he gave full expression to this aspect of his thought. Mr. Edmund Gosse, who saw the volume in manuscript, describes it as "a transcendental treatise in Divine desire seen through the veil of human desire."

V

There are to-day two widely current attitudes to Nature which, diametrically opposed to each other, nevertheless agree in their antagonism to the mystical doctrine. The first is the instinctive attitude of healthy human nature—the pagan delight in the wild, green world, which seems to be threatened by the reign of the sad-faced Christ. No heart that knows what it is to be thrilled with the enchantment of Nature and dance to her magic rhythm but has felt the antagonism between the clear and full-blooded perfection of natural beauty and the brokenness of the Crucified ; between the joy of the laughing earth and the sorrow of Christ. Dora Greenwell has given almost classic expression to this deep-seated mood of the soul, in her description of the young clergyman who had to pay a round of parochial visits after reading Keats for the best part of a golden summer's afternoon in a garden brimming with flowers and a-quiver with birds. "First on my list," he said, "came an old woman, almost stone-deaf, ignorant but anxious. I had to sit beside her before a huge fire ; her son worked at his loom in an inner room, and did not cease when I began to read. How hot and noisy the cottage seemed ; how contracted all around me ! Had the world of light and beauty I lived in, moved in but half an hour ago *collapsed* into this ? How confused, too, seemed my own statements, my very utterance thick and hesitating, as of one under a heavy thrall, for my heart was with Endymion, *and I had to tell the story of Christ.*" [1]

[1] *Two Friends*, p. 51.

Panting for life intensified, for life edged with flame and steeped in sweetness, the restless soul of man shivers as it hears the Voice that bids it throw life itself away. It has made a magic garden for itself—a garden ablaze with flowers, musical with birds; a garden in whose trees dryads whisper their intoxicating secrets, among whose bushes fauns leap in search of fierce delights. And when One shakes the gate and craves admission, the soul is sore perplexed. There is a lure in the mingled strength and pathos of those knockings, a charm in that insistent Voice; but the garden—the garden! Those feet, white with the tears of sinners and the ointment of saints, crimson with the piercing of nails, will surely tread the brimming flower-cups into the earth. Those sad and brooding eyes will scare away nymphs and dryads; at that gentle and compelling Voice the very larks will hold their breath. The loss of this beautiful life, so brimful of wonder and ecstasy, is too heavy a price to pay, even for immortality, "since in a world that will so soon forget us, mortality is so passing sweet."

In certain moods we like to call this attitude a return to what was best in Paganism, and a refuge from that "subterranean conspiracy against life" which passes under the name of Christianity. But was Paganism *really* a well of joy and beauty? There is no melancholy so tenebrous and persistent as that which dogs the steps of the Greek soul; and nowhere did despair show so grey and terrifying a face as in Hellas, the home of flawless form and sky-blue serenity of soul. As Francis Thompson, himself a whole-hearted lover of beauty, shrewdly remarks,

"to read Keats is to grow in love with Paganism; but it is the Paganism of Keats—and *pagan* Paganism was not poetical . . . Bring back even the best age of Paganism, and you smite beauty on the cheek."[1] He reminds us how to the Pagan the beauty of landscape made no appeal. The strength of the hills poured no ardour into his heart; his eyes never filled at the sight of quiet valleys. Virgil, Horace, Cicero, viewed the beauty of a quiet countryside as merely a complex of so many factors which ministered to their ease and well-being. It was with Christianity that true appreciation of natural beauty was born into the world. It needed a faith that worshipped not beautiful things, but the Beauty that is beyond beauty and is essentially spiritual, to reveal to men the transcendent glory of a single tree. To quote Thompson again, "no heathen ever saw the same tree as Wordsworth."[2]

To the Neo-pagan enjoyment of Nature, Mysticism opposes a deep, spiritual delight in which the soul beholds Nature in God, and waxes glad with a mingled sense of awe and joy. This sounds leaden-footed and depressingly didactic to the Neo-pagan, who craves something more immediate and irresponsible. Is it not enough that the sky is blue and the sun filters golden through the leaves? Can we not drink in the glory of the lily and be thrilled by the white mystery of the stars, without laboriously converting them into religious parables and symbols? If Nature is indeed Divine, may we not, *must* we not,

[1] *Works*, vol. iii., pp. 39, 49.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 43.

worship her without any *arrière pensée* or reference to something beyond her? The answer may be given in the bitter and haunting words of one who worshipped Nature with a whole-heartedness and finality that has no parallel in Pagan literature: "The earth is all in all to me," says Richard Jefferies, "but I am nothing to the earth: it is bitter to know this before you are dead. These delicious violets are sweet for themselves; they were not shaped and coloured and gifted with that exquisite proportion and adjustment of odour and hue for me. High up against the grey cloud I hear the lark through the window singing, and each note falls into my heart like a knife." [1] That is the inevitable *envoi* of all such Nature-worship; for no soul can allow the earth to be its all in all with impunity, and that not because such all-absorbing worship is a "sin," but simply because it is contrary to the constitution of things—because the man who so loves Nature divorces himself from Reality. We cannot let Nature be all in all to us, for the simple reason that she *is* not all in all: she is dependent upon God and can therefore only be truly known in Him. It is only to those who see in her the garment of God which conceals as much as it reveals, and to whom she is the bridal veil whose folds create a craving for something behind and beyond itself, that she yields up her pure delights. That is how it came about that Christianity, and not Paganism, opened man's eyes first to the dewy freshness of dawn, the solemnity of evening, the exquisite enchantment of birds, the humble, patient charm of the grass; to the

[1] *Field and Hedgerow*, p. 5.

wondrous beauty of the human face, the unfathomable loveliness of woman's eyes. It was Christ, not Pan, who taught us to consider the lilies. And the same holds true of love. To love one's mistress outside of God, to find the soul's ultimate in the lift of her eyelashes, is to kill love itself—to violate and destroy the Mystery of Beauty. For human love is so indissolubly bound up with its Divine source that it can only reveal its most perfect beauty and yield its most ineffable delights to eyes which look beyond it, to hearts that are yielded to a Divine Lover.

VI

On the other hand, many thoughtful and sensitive souls still see Nature with Tennyson as " red in tooth and claw," and stigmatise her with Huxley as an anti-ethical force, in face of whose insane and savage cruelties faith in a loving Creator is hard, indeed, if not impossible. To such " the religion of Nature " is at once a stupidity and a blasphemy. Mindless and heartless, they say, must be the man who can find unmixed delight in the gigantic shambles and charnel-house we call Nature, or who, by some strange process of mental juggling, can discern a loving Father-spirit at the heart of its cruelty. Nor is this attitude confined to the temperamentally sceptical and pessimistic. In some moods it is common to all thoughtful souls. Lotze, viewing the matter from another angle, remarks that it is not strange that no Nature religions have raised their adherents to any high pitch of morality or culture. And Father Tyrrell throws an

unconscious sidelight upon Lotze's view, when he declares that "the conception of Nature as being, apart from man, a direct expression or self-manifestation of the Divine character, is responsible for the moral and spiritual perversions that are everywhere associated with polytheistic or pantheistic Nature-worship. To worship the caricature of Divinity there revealed to us is really to worship the devil." [1] It is with Nature apart from man that a monadistic system like Lotze's is concerned. But can we really view Nature apart from man—apart from those potentialities of justice and mercy, love and reverence, which are adumbrated in the lower animals and slumber in the most primitive savage? Can we of to-day acquiesce in a dualism which opposes the cosmic to the ethical and Nature to Grace, seeing the Creator and the Saviour in tantalising opposition?

But while protesting against such a view, the mystic cannot afford to forget—nor have the best mystics ever forgotten—that it enshrines an important aspect of truth. Dean Inge, in criticising Lotze's monadism, remarks that "any philosophy which divides man, as a being *sui generis*, from the rest of Nature is inevitably landed either in acosmism or in Manichæan dualism." [2] That is undoubtedly true, and recent philosophy, in its violent reaction from Personal Idealism, lays abundant stress upon it. But we are tempted to forget that a corresponding danger threatens any and every philosophy which, by a knack of juggling with values, makes Nature not

[1] *Lex Orandi*, p. 145.
[2] *Christian Mysticism*, p. 314 (note).

only to include man, but to be synonymous with Spirit. In our recoil from a theology which practically identifies Nature with the kingdom of evil, or, at least, denies to it any inherent God-ward trend, we sometimes fail to recognise that the only way in which we can equate Nature and Grace without losing intellectual integrity and lapsing into a fundamentally unethical conception is by a doctrine of Grace which, in seeing God as the Redeemer of Nature, sees Him first as her Adversary and Judge. If Nature is indeed one with Grace, it is because the act of creation is essentially a *redemptive* act. And redemption implies antagonism: the subduing of chaos to order and beauty, the reclaiming of waste places, the resolving of discord, the overcoming of evil. When we say God "made" the world, we mean that He brought and is still bringing it out of confusion, lawlessness, disharmony, irrationality, and evil into the order of His own law, harmony, reason, and goodness. Upon no Pagan complacency in Nature, upon no Pagan enjoyment of love, could this truth dawn. Only in one way could the true Theodicy in Nature be revealed: by a conception of God which sets Him in relentless and undying opposition not only to evil, but to a merely animal good, by a vision of Jesus as the Root and Crown of creation. At this point Mysticism at once opposes and fulfils both the Pagan and the Pessimist views. It sees love and beauty, not cruelty and brutishness, at the heart of Nature. It recognises God, not blind force, as her animating principle. But the love which the mystic sees in Nature is not an idyllic sentiment, but a devouring

passion which purifies as by fire; the God he worships is not undifferentiated Immanence, but the Lord who was crucified and is risen.

It will readily be seen how greatly asceticism contributed to this conception. The Pagan, whether ancient or modern, sees man rooted in Nature, and Nature as the sum total of his environment. The great ascetics recognised also that if man would indeed be the son of God and the conqueror of Nature, he must take his stand *outside* of Nature and make Eternity his refuge and his home. In turning their backs upon a world which they saw in the naked, unredeemed shame of enmity to God, they lost much but gained more. They built not only better than they knew, but far better than we have as yet realised, laying up with empty hands an imperishable treasure for future ages. Pilgrims and strangers in the land of Nature, they bequeathed to us the golden secret that we can only inherit the earth by colonising it as citizens of Eternity. Even as the perfect Man was born, not of the perfection-haunted Greek, but of the art-disdaining Hebrew, so it needed the extreme asceticism of mediæval sainthood to give birth to the vision of God in Nature. It needed the remorseless self-mortification of a St. John of the Cross, who refused to look at the beauty of the green earth and sang—

> "In Christ I have the mountains,
> The quiet wooded valleys"—

to help us who are of a freer mind to look upon earth with worthier eyes. We smile or are repelled as we

read how St. Teresa, as she advanced in the spiritual life, ceased even from her rare interviews with friends through the *grille*, believing that such human converse stood in the way of a diviner intimacy. But it was through a friendship with God achieved at so cruel a cost that there came to the Christian soul of later ages that high vision and that pure and penetrative understanding by which human love became the sacrament of ineffable Grace. It was only by standing outside Nature that man could come to a knowledge of her Divine character. It was only by becoming her adversary that he could become her redeemer, even as God, in " turning to be our enemy," made Himself the supreme Friend of our race.

VII

The mystic, like the Neo-pagan, lives in a garden, but his is the Garden of the Resurrection, and in the heart of it there is a sepulchre. No willow or cypress betrays the spot : it is known only to the soul and its God, for it lies hidden from man among the Garden's gayest flowers. The grave of the dead self is not where the soul is conscious of its renunciations and mortifications, but where the mirth and *joie de vivre* of true sainthood hide the pain of that slow, deep dying which is man's second birth.[1] The dweller in the Garden, so infantile in his simple gaiety beside the pessimist with his self-conscious *Weltschmertz*, has silently and bravely died a death of which the pessimist knows nothing, and whose exceeding severity his

[1] *Cf.* J. Brett, *The Garden of God*, Chap. V.

nature could not endure. It is from that exceeding bitter death that the soul awakes to find itself in a Garden at dawn of day, "when all wild things are tame and the earth most lovely to look upon"; a Garden replete with youth, beauty and joy; a Garden in which the hedges break into flower at the fall of an approaching shadow, and birds and angels sit together in the trees. A Gardener moves along its walks, and flowers spring up between His wounded feet. But yesterday, the still, white Form seemed to put an anathema upon every fair and joyous hope; now the soul's dread Redeemer, the world's crucified Judge, comes back from death's utmost dereliction to care for the little flowers of human gladness, the trembling grasses of human desire.[1]

It was in this Garden that Coventry Patmore wrote when he urged that religion "is not religion until it has become, not only natural, but so natural that—nothing else seems natural in its presence"; and that "God has no abiding power over even the lower forces of man's nature, so long as they remain unsatisfied and hostile."[2] In a passage which to the Protestant sense of things seems hopelessly Romanist, but whose deeper meaning is open to the spiritually-minded of whatever creed, he says, "'Under the tree where thy mother was debauched, I have redeemed thee.' We are healed by the serpent by which we were slain. It is by the natural desires, made truly natural by inoculation with the Body of

[1] John Cordelier, *The Spiral Way*, p. 129.
[2] *The Rod, the Root, and the Flower*: "Homo," XXI.

Christ, that we are ultimately saved. Religion has no real power, until it becomes *natural*." [1] We may shrink from such an expression as "inoculation with the Body of Christ" as implying a physical and magical conception of the spiritual life—it all depends upon what view we take of our physical nature; but one thing is clear: that even so realistic an expression falls short of conveying the intimacy of the union of the twice-born with their Redeemer. The closest tie of blood, the marriage tie itself, is remote and accidental, compared to the "consanguinity" with Christ of the soul that has been crucified and buried with Him and is alive with Him for evermore.

It is here that the mystical and theosophical distinction between Nature and Eternal Nature is of value. In temporal Nature the mystic sees eternal powers projected and working redemptively in temporal forms. Out of disorders, enmities, rebellions, ruins and horrors, temporal Nature is being redeemed into her eternal prototype. And this redemption is at once cosmic and moral, for it centres not in the subduing and refining of the great forces of Nature, but in the redeeming of human hearts and wills. The great Reconciliation of all things is focussed in the return of the prodigal; the earnest and guarantee of the new heavens and the new earth is in the obedient love and surrendered will of God's redeemed human children. That is why the soul that is born again into the Garden of the Resurrection sees everything in newness and loveliness of aspect, without surrendering

[1] *The Rod, the Root, and the Flower:* "Aurea Dicta," p. 28.

mental honesty or moral insight. It has been born again into the reality of Eternal Nature.

The mystic, then, treads the aisles of Nature, the homely paths of common life, as one who has put on an immortal body and sees dear, familiar things through the "larger, other eyes" of the twice-born. Christ comes to him in the Garden of his delight; and not as a radiant spirit moving through moon-spun meadows of dream does He come: He shows the soul the wounds of His patient hands, His tireless feet; yea, even the spear-cut way to His sacred Heart.[1] And so it comes about that no selfish delight, no Pagan appreciation can survive in the Garden of the Resurrection; for He who walks there among the lilies is He who thrusts His beloved ones forth to plant the seed of life in the very furrows of death. To the rough and stony places of earth, to the wilderness and the unfriendly city, are they sent. And when, shrinking from so hard a task, they would tarry in the cool and dewy fragrance of the Garden, as Dora Greenwell's admirer of *Endymion* was loth to shake the gold-dust of dreams from his eyelids and to go and tell the Gospel story in village hovels, He smiles and whispers to them His counsel of perfection. Then they are rebuked and understand. They know that there is a charm like the charm of *Endymion* which is confined within the covers of a book, the duration of a mood, the limits of painless, happy hours; and there is a Charm that is with us alway, even unto the end of the world.

[1] John Cordelier, *The Spiral Way*, p. 132.

CHAPTER IX

MYSTICISM AND PHILOSOPHY

ὁ νοῦς βασιλεύς.

PLOTINUS.

To think well is to serve God in the interior court.

TRAHERNE.

Sir, I oppose not rational to spiritual, for spiritual is most rational.

WHICHCOTE.

Christianity has been a philosophical religion from the time when it first began to have a sacred literature.

INGE.

SYNOPSIS

Anti-intellectualism of present-day mystical thought—Its connection with Bergson's philosophy. I. John Cordelier on "The Child amongst the Doctors"—A perverted cult of the "child" in religion. II. Miss Underhill's anti-intellectualism in *The Mystic Way*—A manipulation of historical facts—Jesus and the Pharisees—Intuitions of Grace include a demand for reasoned interpretation—The static helplessness of thought a fiction—How are oppositions overcome in "experience"?—What is true in intuitionalism is not new. III. The testimony of history—The relation of thought to spiritual insight in mystical literature: St. Augustine's *Confessions*, Plotinus, Scotus Erigena, Eckhart, Boehme, etc.—Even devotional mystics essentially thinkers: Law, Lady Julian, Blessed Angela de Foligno, Ruysbroeck—The influence of Platonism and of Greek theology—Dr. A. V. G. Allen on the Alexandrian school—Influence of the Latin theology and of Scholasticism. IV. Present-day Mysticism powerless as an intellectual force—Dr. H. B. Workman on Clement and Origen as intellectual pioneers—Pre-Reformation Mysticism an intellectual solvent and theological ferment—Luther's relation to Mysticism—The passing of speculative Mysticism—Professor Troeltsch on the need for a new Platonism—A de-intellectualised Mysticism spiritually impotent—Bishop Chandler's *Cult of the Passing Moment*. V. The antagonism between intellect and intuition largely illusory—Mr. Bertrand Russell on intuition—Professor Croce on Hegel and Bergson—Popular perversion of Bergson's "plunge into Reality"—M. Récéjac on the most dangerous aberration of Mysticism—The lust for immediacy—Mr. Bosanquet upon the inadequacy of the given—Is philosophy capable of dealing with life? VI. Intuition both rooted in latent reason and the crown of reasoning—"The intellect and will energising under the impulse of Love"—Scotus Erigena on the nature of "understanding"—Pascal on love as reason—Miss Underhill's vicious antithesis between life and knowledge, and between the "inward" and the "outward" in Christian experience—Mr. Bosanquet on a false immediacy—Voluntarism logically incompatible with Mysticism — Spiritual provincialism no longer possible for the mystic—The identity of the rational and the spiritual.

CHAPTER IX

MYSTICISM AND PHILOSOPHY

JUST as mediæval Mysticism was a protest against a barren scholastic system, so the present-day revival of Mysticism is born of a revolt against a dry and tyrannous intellectualism. And precisely as certain mediæval mystics exalted the will and the emotions not only at the expense but practically to the exclusion of the intellect, so most present-day writers on Mysticism (Baron von Hügel and Dean Inge are the most notable exceptions) deprecate the intellect in the supposed interests of what they call "life."[1] In this they are influenced not so much by the anti-intellectualism of mediæval mystics as by the characteristic μισολογία of a certain school of modern philosophy which is generally associated with the name of Bergson, but which dates back to Lotze, and had invaded theological thought long before the brilliant French philosopher had been popularised into

[1] This cult of the *élan vital* is a characteristic instance of the way in which a suggestive and influential philosophy may be popularised into a vicious mental obsession. By turning Bergson's tentative conception of the cosmic life into the shibboleth of a school, a certain number of his disciples have made it every whit as pale and lifeless an abstraction as they imagine "Thought" to be. As to how far Bergson's conception is in itself merely a hypostatised abstraction with no real resemblance to the mystical idea of Life is a problem we cannot enter upon here. At any rate, the rise of a Bergsonian cult has made the true understanding of Bergson's own doctrine doubly difficult. There is only one way of understanding a philosophy: to apply it candidly and consistently to the whole universe of problems. To twist it into an apologetic is always fatal.

an apologist for what a reviewer has shrewdly called "religion without thought." It is interesting to note that while anti-intellectualist writers on Mysticism cannot say enough about the narrowing dogmatism of the Ritschlian view of religion, they themselves rival that school in the art of cutting the world in two with a hatchet and are betrayed into precisely the same disability of dealing with life as a full-orbed unity.

I

This vicious attitude may be seen in its most practical application in the devotional writings of John Cordelier, a writer in whom, amid much that is beautiful and illuminating, the pseudo-mystic's lofty contempt for traditional piety and popular religion comes into somewhat unpleasant prominence. Writing of the child Jesus in the temple, he says:[1] "We are growing, stretching out in all directions . . . and suddenly we see, as a dazzling vision, wisdom and understanding awaiting us, enticing us with their promises, ready, as we think, to snatch us from the dim, uncertain world of intuition and satisfy our new and arrogant demand that we may *know*. . . . So we loose the hand of Life, our mother, and run to find knowledge among the doctors—knowledge of God and man, having yet to learn that the only way of illumination for immortal yet imprisoned spirit is the way of Pain and Growth and Love. . . . The child Christ fancied He was about His Father's business when He disputed with the theologians in

[1] *The Spiral Way:* V. "The Child amongst the Doctors."

the temple porch, and tried, by the exploration of their traditional wisdom, to discover the secret of that mysterious Life which He felt, but did not understand. He left the actualities of human experience for the abstractions and the subtleties of the intellectual world. At once he was 'lost' in respect of humanity; the virgin soul that had borne the Divine Seed and cherished it now sought for its traces in vain."

After pointing out, somewhat in contradiction to his fundamental attitude, that the way to life does not consist in the acquirement of some jealously-guarded knowledge, the property of a closed confraternity of adepts, Mr. Cordelier seeks to show that the hill of Calvary, and not the hill of Zion, is the soul's ultimate goal, and that the road to Calvary is by way of Nazareth. "Not the head, but the heart," he insists, "is spirit's growing-point. Divine humanity shall attain to manhood's stature, power, and courage not by anything taught, told, or shown, but by difficult choices made, work honestly done."

Now all this is simply a popular devotional commentary upon the anti-intellectual conception of Mysticism which we find expounded in such books as Miss Underhill's *The Mystic Way*. It is, at bottom, a religious version of the well-worn superstition that the average toiler in contact with the grim realities of naked existence has, *ipso facto*, a truer insight into the heart of life than the philosopher and teacher, who, according to this theory, is merely an onlooker in the game. That thought is not the inutile hobby of a few arm-chair philosophers, but part of the very stuff of life; that it has a history and a passion; that

it is nothing less than the constructive principle which brings a cosmos out of the seething chaos of sensations, impressions, and intuitions which we loosely call Experience—all this does not seem to enter the minds of these eager eulogists of the man who sees life in terms of bread and cheese. No one would, of course, deny that a peculiarly profound insight may come to the humble worker through his grim struggle for existence ; but such insight will come to him precisely in the measure in which he is a *thinker* and seeks to interpret his experience.

To say that the village carpenter may see things that are hidden from the eyes of the *savant* is as convincing as an argument as to agree that Cowper's little girl reading her Bible at her cottage door was in the possession of " truths that the brilliant Frenchman never knew." Both assertions are unimpeachable, but one may be excused for asking with the mythical senior wrangler who tried to read *Paradise Lost*, " What is proven ? " Surely, our Lord's declaration that things hidden from the wise and prudent are revealed unto babes bears a far less platitudinarian meaning than those who are given to opposing illiterate piety to scholarly arrogance have discovered. When we consider the historical situation out of which that great saying arose, it becomes abundantly clear that it cannot fairly be used as an argument against intellectualism. The Pharisees, while consummate masters of a niggling ceremonial ethic and displaying an amazing adroitness in the intricacies of legal casuistry, could not by any stretch of imagination be termed thinkers ; and the term " wise and

prudent" becomes charged, on the lips of Jesus, with a gentle but most incisive irony which only those strenuous persons who appeal to such a text in the interests of a pet theory can possibly miss. And while the "little flock" of His unlettered, loyal-hearted followers would certainly be in Christ's mind as He spoke of "babes," we must remember that the babe may wear, and often has worn, the philosopher's mantle, and that Plato entered in where many a Christian Pharisee, proud of his narrow ignorance and a child in everything but the child-like heart, was shut out from the Kingdom.

There never was a time when the Christian doctrine of the wisdom of babes was so curiously perverted as to-day. Our religious life and literature are infected with a curious cult of the spiritual babe, which very often runs to an attitude of sheer babyishness. Our devotional books, and more especially those with a mystical flavour, are characterised by a strange, deliberate, and often positively unpleasant artificial simplicity of language, and by a "viciously acquired *naïveté*" of thought which is frankly repellent to sincere minds. Often both language and thought are laborious imitations of the mediæval, and as often they are pale and attenuated adaptations of the factitious and the exotic in impressionist literature. Many of our most popular mystical volumes present the distressing appearance of entirely sophisticated and reflective persons cudgelling themselves into an attitude of lisping childishness. Again and again we are reminded that philosophy cannot inherit the Kingdom of God and that the heavenly Father

delights in revealing His hidden things to babes ; and the impression conveyed is that the Creator of the mind takes special pleasure in elderly infants, whose innocent and loving mien disappears as if by magic the moment some matter of mundane business is mooted. Sometimes this attitude takes an aggressive and controversial form, and the assumptions of the proud intellect are combated with a vehemence and dogmatism which certainly do not err on the side of humility, while the stupidities and anachronisms of " official " theology are castigated with a very adult fist indeed. One might say that never has the lamb stalked through our literature so fearsomely arrayed in wolves' clothing as in some of these most aggressive and combative *apologiæ* for the exclusive rights of the still and humble heart. The ascendance of such a spirit stultifies the spiritual life it intends to exalt, and offers an insult, not to the wise and prudent, but to the meek and humble who live by keeping the things they hear and *pondering* them in their hearts.

II

How an anti-intellectual bias in the interpretation of Mysticism must inevitably issue in a defective reading of history, and of the mystical experience itself, is shown, as we have hinted already, in Miss Underhill's book, *The Mystic Way*, where, alongside of much that is profoundly suggestive, we have a treatment of the experience of Jesus, the Apostles and the early Church, so divorced from the established canons of historical inquiry and exegetical integrity

as to sink to the merely fanciful at the most critical junctures. Miss Underhill—and it must always be borne in mind that she represents a large and influential school—seems to regard the intellect as decidedly in the way where spiritual adventures are concerned. Thus, after voicing the soul's perennial question, Whither ? she says, " To address such a question to our intellects is to invite failure in the reply ; for the careful mosaic of neatly-fitted conceptions which those intellects will offer us in return will have none of the peculiar qualities of life : it will be but a ' practical simplification of reality,' made by that well-trained sorting-machine in the interests of our daily needs. Only by direct contact with life in its wholeness can we hope to discern its drift, to feel the pulsations of its mighty rhythm ; and this we can never contrive save by the help of those who by loyal service and ever-renewed effort have vanquished the crystallising tendencies of thought and attained an immediate if imperfect communion with Reality—' that race of divine men who through a more excellent power and with piercing eyes acutely perceive the supernal light ' —the artists, the poets, the prophets, the seers ; the happy owners of unspoilt perceptions ; the possessors of that intuition which alone is able to touch upon absolute things." [1]

The passage is representative of the characteristic attitude of present-day writers on Mysticism. It explains how it is possible that an exponent who possesses so competent a knowledge of the psychology of Mysticism, and so minute an acquaintance with the

[1] *The Mystic Way*, p. 8.

lives and writings of the great practical and devotional mystics, as Miss Underhill does, should manifest a certain deliberate neglect of the great speculative mystics and an unconcealed impatience with anything like intellectual inquiry. If it is the peculiar merit of the true mystic to "vanquish the crystallising tendencies of thought," then Plotinus, Augustine, Scotus Erigena, Meister Eckhart, Jacob Boehme, the Cambridge Platonists, and indeed any and every mystic who is also a consecutive thinker, fall short of the ideal, and obscure rather than illuminate the Mystic Way. In Miss Underhill's view it is everywhere the psychology of the new life that counts. From that point of view, and that point of view only, the development of Jesus and of Paul is carefully traced. The corresponding development in their thought is barely touched upon; nor does the treatment include a study of the origin and growth of fundamental New Testament conceptions. Throughout we hear of a growing adaptation to the Absolute, a plunging into the vital movement of Reality; but never of a clarifying of ideas, a coming to birth of a new dialectic.

An anti-intellectual conception of the spiritual life inevitably leads to a manipulation of historical facts and to a vicious method of interpretation. We are not concerned here with the legitimacy, or otherwise, of a mystical or allegorical interpretation of Scripture passages. Where such interpretations are not offered as attempts to elicit the writer's actual and literal meaning, and where, however far removed from it, they ring true to the depths of the human soul, we

may take them as belonging to that larger exegesis which gathers round every inspired book and is justified by something deeper than exact scholarship. What is in question here, however, is not the right to allegorise a text, but the right to falsify a historical figure. Do what we may, we cannot be content to see Jesus as Miss Underhill or Mr. Cordelier sees Him and still retain our mental integrity. The Cross, and all it meant, and the ministry of which it was the culminating point, did *not* grow immediately out of the homely, simple life of Nazareth, but issued out of long and patient brooding upon the facts of life, and upon the very documents round which the Pharisees had woven their close-meshed net of tradition. Call Jesus a genius, if you will, of whom it could be said that He knew "letters," having never learned: it still remains that His knowledge came by way of a close and disciplined study of the books of the Law and the Prophets. He stood in the temple and taught. His polemic against the Pharisees was not the unreasoned fulmination of a self-styled theosophist, who claimed to be in possession of all knowledge and learning without having passed through the schools. He met them as a teacher meets opposing teachers, and joined issue with them on their own ground. We cannot, of course, claim Him on either one or the other side of our well-worn controversy between intuitionalists and the intellectualists. Such an opposition was quite foreign to His mind and to the atmosphere of His day, and had no place whatever in the situation in which He acted. But from the spirit and temper of His utterances, and from the impression and effect of

His Gospel upon His disciples, this much may be gathered: that if He inveighed against the claims of the intellect, it was always against *reasoning* as opposed to *Reason;* against mere learning as opposed to Wisdom. We cannot construe His teaching into a depreciation of the intellect without falsifying it to some degree; it is a case of putting the picture out of perspective in order to prove a preconceived theory of art, and the result never deceives persons of robust sense. If it be permissible to use the words "intuition" and "thought" in writing of a teaching into which such abstractions never entered, we might say that Jesus accepted both at their full value, recognising their indissoluble relation to each other, and that He attacked the scholars and ecclesiastics of His day, not for thinking overmuch, but for thinking *wrongly*. And if it be insisted that what He bequeathed to His followers was not a body of thought, but a few creative intuitions, it must be added that these intuitions, by their very nature, carried in themselves the imperative demand for intellectual interpretation and formulation. The theology of St. Paul is not a separable addition to his spiritual experience, nor is it merely a consequence of that experience; it is rather, in a deep sense, part of that experience. True, it was the grace of God, and not his theological interpretation of it, that made him what he was; but that grace would have been less than itself had it not included *a creative demand for reasoned interpretation.* The experience of reconciliation has ever been the generator of thought, the fountain of doctrine; and just as a fact is not truly and wholly a fact if it does

not include an interpretative theory, so the new life in Christ, to be life indeed and not merely a set of moods, impressions and sensations, must include its reasoned interpretation.

The opposition between "life" and "thought" is written large over the work of Miss Underhill and kindred interpreters. Everywhere the "life movement" of intuitional experience is contrasted with the "static helplessness" of thought. Again and again we are told that the intellect works merely in the interests of an artificial simplification and abstraction,[1] that it classifies, tabulates, indexes; in short, that it reduces living, moving things to the state of dead museum-objects. We are ceaselessly reminded that it is not through thought, but through living participation in the movement of Reality, that the true mystic reconciles the transcendent and the immanent, being and becoming; and there is an attraction and a plausibility about such a presentation which makes a strong appeal, especially to impressionable souls who shrink from the task of logical thinking. But can there be any such living participation without thought? Is there such a thing as a vital experience (as distinct from mere sensation) apart from the sifting, interpreting, constructing function of thought? To say that the oppositions of transcendence and immanence, being and becoming, are overcome "in experience" is to say nothing, unless it means that experience includes the inter-

[1] For a most powerful and instructive vindication of the essential concreteness of thought, see Professor Aliotta's recently-translated book, *The Idealistic Reaction against Science.*

pretative and unifying function of thought. Experience from which thought is excluded cannot overcome any oppositions. For it the two contradictories simply exist side by side, and such co-existence, in the last resort, imposes the same unreal and illusory character upon life as the abstract intellectualism which juggles them away *sub specie æternitatis*. They can only exist side by side without utterly invalidating the experience which professes to reconcile them, in as far as the intellect is able to suggest a reason for them which is firmly grounded in the nature of things. And as a matter of hard fact, there is no logician so "logical" as to deny that the most important and influential realities come to us by way of intuition or insight, just as there is no mystic so "mystical" as not to apply his reflective reason to the experience gained in moments of supreme insight, or to shrink from employing his best reasoning powers to persuade himself and the world that reason is a most inferior and clumsy instrument. Moreover, the most purely practical and devotional mystics were also the most slow to accept the uncorroborated testimony of their intuitions, and had recourse at every step to the faculty they most despised to sift and correct the reports of the faculty they most valued. And, as we have seen already, the intuitionalist claims to make a synthesis of the transcendent and the immanent, and after availing himself of the constructive faculty which makes such a synthesis possible, proceeds to exclude it from its own product under the name of intellectualism. He has a curious horror of the unifying activity of the intellect, which he conceives as

consisting in the imposition of an artificial *schema* upon Reality. From his presentation of the matter one would conclude that the unity of the world was not a reality at all, but that the intellect, instead of merely recognising the underlying unity of things and showing our inarticulate experiences to be parts of a coherent whole, manufactures that unity and coherence.

From what has been said already, it will be easily seen that the whole discussion is needlessly complicated by a persistent element of logomachy. One half of the mystic's protest against intellectualism is not directed against the righteous claims of the reason at all, but merely against the usurping arrogance of the discursive understanding. That intellect in this narrow sense cannot enter the kingdom of spirit is too obvious a principle to need defending at this late day; nor are attacks upon "pure" reason any more pertinent, for the conception of pure reason, *i.e.*, reason acting *in vacuo*, is as extinct as the proverbial dodo. One suspects that while most exponents of an intuitionalist doctrine of mystical experience are excellent psychologists, they are not quite so well equipped on the metaphysical side, and seem to some extent to lack understanding for the historical development of philosophy. As a result, they sometimes tilt against windmills, and at other times tend to present as new discoveries what Aristotle and Plotinus taught as commonplaces of philosophic doctrine. The doctrine that a static universe is an unreal universe in which nothing ever really happens is a case in point.

III

For an immediate and concrete refutation of the all-too-readily-accepted shibboleth of thought *versus* life, we need only go to the history of Mysticism. Not only do we find that the best mystics persistently reflected upon their visions, but also that the most profound, moving and truly inspired passages in mystical literature were the direct outcome of severe and systematic thinking—the sparks that flew up as the writer beat his dialectic out upon the anvil of a strenuous mind. A glance at the *Confessions* of St. Augustine suffices to demonstrate the force of this contention. These innumerable passages of the most profound and poignant insight, in which the soul on the stretch towards God has found its classic expression, passages which exhibit that mingling of splendour and loveliness, prophetic fire and literary charm that go to make great writing, are seen to spring from an inexorable process of dogged wrestling with intellectual problems. The lyric cry of the soul soars skyward from out the hum of the mental workshop; poetry of a more piercingly exquisite beauty than any rhymed verse blossoms upon the gnarled stem of logic. The same is true, in varying measure, of Plotinus,[1] Dionysius, Scotus Erigena, Eckhart, and Boehme; of St. Thomas Aquinas, in as far as he was a mystic; of the Cambridge Platonists, Traherne, S. T. Coleridge, Wordsworth, and other intellectual contemplatives.

[1] I venture reluctantly to differ from so eminent an authority as Baron von Hügel, who finds inconsistency and antagonism between the philosophical and the mystical utterances of Plotinus (*Eternal Life*, p. 83). As I read Plotinus, his mystical utterances seem to spring immediately from his dialectic.

And when we turn to the great non-speculative mystics, such as the two SS. Catherine, St. Teresa, Blessed Angela de Foligno, Lady Julian, St. John of the Cross, Richard Rolle, Walter Hilton and many others, we find that it was a process of reflection, analysis, and construction—a process which, however far removed from academic standards, was nevertheless essentially one of *thought*—that gave birth to their most moving appeal, their most abiding message.

Almost without exception, to come upon an explicitly anti-intellectual passage in mystical literature is to discover a conspicuously *uninspired* passage. Especially is this true of endeavours of mystical writers to describe the "sleep" of reason under the ravishing touch of the Godhead, where the world is but the stage-scenery against which the drama of the God-intoxicated soul plays itself out, and where memory, will, and thought are all suspended in the beatific vision. Such utterances, as a rule, not only lack sanity and the moral realism which is the salt of the spirit; they also, strangely enough, lack all those qualities of spiritual fervour and immediacy of religious feeling which make the best devotional literature immortal. They lack wings and eyes; or having them, there is no wind in their wings, no living light in their eyes. They give point to Dr. McTaggart's too-little-heeded warning which bids us remember that "a Mysticism which ignored the claims of the understanding would, no doubt, be doomed. None ever went about to break logic, but in the end logic broke him." [1]

[1] *Studies in Hegelian Cosmology, p.* 292.

It may, of course, be argued that whatever be true of ideal Mysticism, the majority of great mystics, and not least those who possessed high mental powers, were, in the main, anti-intellectual, however many isolated passages might be adduced to prove the contrary. That is undoubtedly true; but what we are concerned with is not the theoretical anti-intellectualism of the mystics, but the fact that, even where they most strenuously opposed the claims of the intellect, they remained, in the deep and vital sense, *thinkers*. As to-day, so with them, reason was "the stone which the *builders* refused"—it was the men who made the most lofty and triumphant use of the intellect who rejoiced in pulverising it; and it is their practice, not their theory, which is the decisive factor. Moreover, as we have pointed out already, their fulminations are to a large extent directed not against Reason at all, but against the logic-chopping activity of the discursive understanding, as manifested, *e.g.*, in scholastic hair-splitting or in the platitudes of eighteenth-century Deism. Even so thoroughgoing and extreme a voluntarist as William Law appeals throughout to the higher reason. Read in isolation, the passages in which he glorifies the will as the supreme alchemist and master of magic in the soul's laboratory and the concentrated essence of life itself, and his frequent contemptuous references to the understanding and the acquirement of knowledge, argue a μισολογία of the most uncompromising type.[1] But read his treatises as a whole, and it will appear

[1] For an abundance of such passages see *The Spirit of Prayer* and *The Way to Divine Knowledge*.

that they are addressed from beginning to end to the reason that is in man. Only a truly reasoning and reasonable soul could appreciate Law's magnificent logic; a person who lived solely and simply by his intuitions and feelings—*i.e.*, a mere religious impressionist—would be left utterly cold and probably a good deal bored by it.

The same is true, in a less explicit sense, of the *Revelations* of Lady Julian. No devotional book breathes such pure, spontaneous, warm feeling as this genial yet profound work. Its simplicity and immediacy affect the reader as a mountain rill; nothing is studied, premeditated, or reasoned out. Yet through it also there runs the high Platonic sanity and logic which only the genuinely rational soul can appreciate. It is informed with a reasonableness which owes nothing to reasoning but everything to Reason. A similar judgment would hold true of the Blessed Angela de Foligno, concerning whose famous *Book of Visions* Miss Underhill remarks discerningly that "in it we seem to hear the voice of Plotinus speaking from the Vale of Spoleto"[1]; and a certain deep reasonableness and thoughtfulness is, in varying degrees and kinds, predicable of all the great practical and devotional mystics. Professedly anti-intellectual, they none the less demonstrated in practice the high function of the intellect in shaping mystical experience. Even Ruysbroeck, while he conceives of reason "standing wide-eyed but unseeing in the midst of the shadow"[2] which is the cloud upon the mount of vision, is

[1] *Mysticism*, p. 418.
[2] *Flowers from a Mystic Garden*, p. 82.

careful to insist that " this luminous ignorance, though in itself beyond reason, is yet not alien from it,[1] but that, on the contrary, when the spirit of man feels the touch of God, " the illumined reason shares the contact." [2] And, as we have seen already in this and previous chapters, when we turn to the great speculative mystics and to intellectual contemplatives of the Wordsworthian type, we note how the intellectual and visionary powers rise and fall together, and how often, as with Peter and John at the sepulchre, it is the slower-going of the two—intellect, not intuition—which gets first to the goal. Thus, with Eckhart reason is the fiery dart which pierces the clouds. " The reason," he says audaciously, " presses ever upwards. It cannot rest content with goodness or wisdom or even with God Himself. It must penetrate to the Ground from whence all goodness and wisdom spring." And again, in terse phrase, " Reasonable knowledge is eternal life."

But it is when we go back to what may be called the great origins of Christian Mysticism that we see how deeply it is rooted in philosophic thought. The great *præparatio mystica* was Platonism, with its commanding intellectual sweep and its noble wonder and reverence. It was the Platonic and Stoic leaven —in other words, the beautiful rationality of Greek thought—which kept the Asiaticised compound called Neoplatonism sweet and pure enough to be the main source and inspiration of the finest mediæval and modern Mysticism. Greek philosophy, coming to

[1] *Flowers from a Mystic Garden*, p. 60.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 24.

the later mystics through the austere and exalted thought of Plotinus and the informed and penetrative imagination of Scotus Erigena, and Greek theology, represented by Clement, Origen, Methodius, and the other great thinkers who laid the foundation of an as yet unexploited Logos-doctrine, are the twin streams which to this day make glad the mystical city of God. Even the triumphant incursion of Augustinianism could not quench the influence of Alexandrian thought as far as Mysticism was concerned. The most obediently Catholic mystics, though formally submitting to the Carthaginian dogma and to a large extent writing in the dialect of Hippo, were never wholly converted to Augustinianism; for no one can be a mystic and exchange the personal, living, inward Teacher—the *Deus loquens* of Greek theology—for the forensic and impersonal grace of Western dogma. Nor must it be forgotten that to the last St. Augustine remained a Neoplatonist and a mystic in spite of himself, and that by a certain irony of fate he, more than any other except Plotinus, served to keep alive the mystic spirit and doctrine.

It is important to remember that Mysticism is not merely in its very nature the timeless religion of inward experience, the perennial witness to the authority of the Spirit, the reality of the soul's contact with God. Historically also it stands for freedom and inwardness, and the Christian mystic, at any rate, may well be proud of the rock whence he was hewed.[1] In his still

[1] In speaking of the sources of Christian Mysticism, I have ventured to take its fontal source—the New Testament and especially the Fourth Gospel—for granted.

unrivalled study, *The Continuity of Christian Thought*, Dr. A. V. G. Allen lays just emphasis upon the fact that in the second and third centuries "Alexandria had become more thoroughly Greek than Athens in the days of its renown. For the first time in history thought was absolutely free. . . . The limits of thought were as boundless as the flight of the human imagination. In such an atmosphere it was inevitable that the largest hearing should be accorded to him who spoke most directly and powerfully to the heart, the conscience, and the reason of the age. . . . The Christian thinkers in Alexandria, at that favoured moment in the history of thought, gave the outlines of a theology which for spirituality and Catholicity could never be rivalled or even appreciated at its true value, till, in an age like our own, the same conditions which made its first appearance possible should make its reproduction a necessity." [1]

In estimating the intellectual factors which went to the origination and development of Christian Mysticism, it is, of course, possible to ascribe too exclusive an influence to Alexandrian thought. The Latin theology,[2] while it narrowed the religious conceptions and, to a greater or lesser extent, enslaved the spirit of the mediæval mystics, supplied the element of moral realism which the later developments of the Greek theology lacked. At the other end of the scale, even Gnosticism, with all its vagaries and degeneracies, stimulated the healthy instinct to

[1] Pp. 33-34.

[2] It must not be forgotten that up to the beginning of the scholastic period Latin theology was informed with Platonic realism.

aspire to "a gnosis spoken among the perfect," and in its protean mediæval forms kept the flame of speculative freedom burning for those who little dreamed of their indebtedness to it. How vitally Mysticism was influenced by Scholasticism for good as well as for evil has scarcely been adequately recognised. In one sense, later mediæval Mysticism may be termed a development of Scholasticism.[1] It remains, however, that the main historical source of Mysticism as a reasoned attitude was Alexandrian Platonism.

IV

Present-day Mysticism seems to have forgotten that it was when the disciples reasoned together that Jesus Himself drew near, and it is curious to note that even a Church reputed for her intolerance and dogmatic despotism should have given a larger liberty to the speculative intellect than is given by the modern champions of spiritual freedom and inwardness. The magnificently daring work of the Christian Platonists found a more respectful and appreciative treatment even in the Church of St. Bernard than with a representative type of modern exponents of Mysticism which glories in classing Plotinus with Hegel as a groper along the *cul de sac* of uninspired wisdom. In

[1] While Scholasticism impresses the popular mind with its dry and niggling intellectual quality, it should be remembered that one of its principles was *Pectus facit theologum.* Thus it came about that while, on the one hand, Gerson attempted to reduce Mysticism to an exact science, on the other hand, the Scotist reaction, with its distrust of reason, encouraged a Mysticism that sought in devotional fervour a refuge from intellectual bankruptcy, and, so far from involving the highest exercise of reason, offered itself, in quite latter-day fashion, as a substitute for thinking.

the great days of Alexandria the leaders of a movement which, though not pure Mysticism, carried within itself the essential elements of Mysticism were triumphantly adequate to the needs of their day. As Dr. H. B. Workman admirably puts it, "Clement and Origen attempted with a wonderful measure of success to do for the Christianity of the third century what St. Thomas Aquinas and the great Schoolmen accomplished for the mediæval Church, what Erasmus and the humanists of the Renaissance failed to do for the Church of the Reformation, what many of the deepest thinkers and most loyal Christians of to-day see must be done for the Church of the twentieth century."[1] It will immediately be objected that it is no part of the function of Mysticism (if indeed anything so deliberate and pragmatic as a "function" may justly be predicated of what is a free and spontaneous movement of the spirit) to create or reconstruct a philosophy or a theology. But, as a matter of fact, mystical thought has always acted as an intellectual solvent and a positive factor in theological construction just in proportion as it was genuinely mystical. Unacknowledged for the most part, but none the less active, mystical theology has been the ferment in every theological reaction, the leaven in every spiritual movement, the constructive impulse in every reform. Behind Luther's reformation stood the influence of mystical groups as represented by the *Theologia Germanica* which Luther republished, and to which he acknowledged a deep indebtedness; by the work of John Wesel Gansfoort, with whom

[1] *Christian Thought to the Reformation*, p. 44.

Luther avowed himself in such close mental consonance, and by the mystic leaven which had penetrated the Dominican and other Orders and touched Luther through Staupitz. Luther, however, never really understood the influences which lay behind his own doctrine of justification by faith. His unreasoning fulminations against the mystics of his age have become classic, and he initiated an attitude which came to be part and parcel of the German mind and found its characteristic modern expression in the Ritschlian view. The old moral dualism was replaced by a new intellectual dualism. Speculative Mysticism, which had for so long kept alive the conviction of the underlying unity of all knowledge, and which, in this particular sense, found its completion and crown in St. Thomas Aquinas,[1] passed away, and its function was taken over by the professional philosopher, who gloried in his complete independence of and separation from religious thought.

This is why to-day we find it so hard to extricate ourselves from the *impasse* into which our undigested neo-Kantian dualism has brought us. The only way of escape is through a reaffirmation, in terms of modern thought, of the Logos conception, and the development of a new Christian Platonism. The only philosophy which can ever yield us a consistent metaphysic of the Christian faith is a new Platonism, controlled and corrected by a reinterpretation of the

[1] *Cf.* Professor Hastings Rashdall's estimate of the work of St. Thomas in *The Universities of Europe in the Middle Ages.* While, of course, recognising that in one sense the work of St. Thomas Aquinas must be done over again, Dr. Rashdall shows that in another sense it was final, for it was built on "the grand conviction that reason is Divine, and that all knowledge and all truth must be capable of harmonious adjustment."

Pauline and Johannine conceptions, and it is most significant to find a German philosopher, Professor Ernst Troeltsch, sharing this conviction. "In my opinion," says Professor Troeltsch, in the course of a reply to the Ritschlian Kaftan's criticism of his own theological position, "the sharper stress of the scientific and philosophical spirit in modern times has made that blend [Neoplatonism and New Testament Christianity] the only possible solution of the problem at the present day, and I do not doubt that this synthesis of Neoplatonism and Christianity will once more be dominant in modern thought." [1]

And a de-intellectualised Mysticism is not merely powerless to influence the world's thought; it is also spiritually depleted. As in the Gospel story, the reasoning mind and the burning heart go together, and a Mysticism which lacks intellectual virility will sooner or later be smitten with spiritual impotence.

One of the most disquieting characteristics of present-day devotional Mysticism, even where it explicitly dissociates itself from any and every form of theosophy and follows the main stream of Christian thought, is its refusal to attempt anything like an intellectual interpretation and unification of the moments of spiritual experience. This is most strikingly seen in Bishop Chandler's forceful and suggestive book, *The Cult of the Passing Moment*. As the title implies, the volume stands for spiritual impressionism—for that element in Mysticism which makes each fragment of spiritual experience a self-contained

[1] *Theologische Literaturzeitung*, 1912, p. 727.

whole, "the instant made eternity."[1] For Bishop Chandler the radical mistake which has depotentialised nine-tenths of our spiritual life is the lust to harmonise and to systematise the intimations of God to the soul at various times. He contends that in the interest of securing an imaginary consistency, demands which seem to conflict with previous demands are ignored or flatly disobeyed, and so the soul escapes from the control of the living God into the dead hand of its own passion for formal harmony. The ideal is rather the attitude of the humble local preacher who, when God told him to do a thing which seemed in direct opposition to the Divine order of a day before, gave the Almighty "no back-talk," but simply "went and did it." In such simplicity and immediacy of faith, which is nothing else than the "moment by moment" doctrine of Keswick and kindred types of evangelical conviction, the soul grows strong, and the life develops in harmony with its Divine pattern. Behind the apparently inconsistent communications of God there is a plan, but that plan belongs to God only. "Ours not to make reply, ours not to reason why"; the consistency and rationality of the Divine plan are hidden from us, and our sole part is to render immediate and whole-hearted obedience to each demand as it comes to us, without seeking to reconcile it to anything that has gone before, or to discover a unifying purpose behind it. The plan is God's concern, not ours.

Such an attitude is characteristic of this type of

[1] See specially the whole of Section I., *The Cult of the Passing Moment* (*a*).

mystical conviction; but whither does it lead? It has only one logical outcome: a purely subjective and infra-rational standard of personal inspiration which denies authority, not only to all the past experience of the individual, but to every historical expression of the mind of God, including the Cross of Christ. It is only the *lack* of a thorough-going logic which keeps the cult of the passing moment in the hands of writers like Bishop Chandler subordinated to the worship of the abiding Christ. Bishop Chandler's mystical discipline is based upon the principle that the Cross makes the saint; but if it be imperative that we test the word that comes to us moment by moment by the Word of the Cross, by what show of reason can we refuse to compare it with the word of yesterday, which, on that same principle, was only accepted because it was a valid exemplification of the greater Word? If it be right and profitable to trace—as far as finite minds can trace—the redemptive plan of God as it is manifest in the life of Jesus and the history of His Church, how can it be wrong and weakening to seek to trace the same plan as it is expressed for us in the moments of our past experience? That there is a narrow and peddling sense of continuity, which on the communal scale manifests itself as enslavement to tradition, and on the individual scale as an infatuation with literal consistency, has always been recognised by the masters of the spiritual life. Such a misinterpretation of the Divine consistency in terms of mere formal logic has in all ages retarded great reforms, and kept the individual from being obedient to his heavenly visions. But the

existence of a false ideal of consistency does not absolve us, surely, from doing justice to that divinely-implanted instinct for continuity and coherence which is the birthright of every rational soul. If God has a plan for us, it is our duty and privilege to attempt humbly and reverently to understand that plan and think His thoughts after Him. There will certainly come a point in our experience when a demand or message, apparently in sharp contradiction to all that has gone before, will present itself with Divine authority before our amazed consciousness. At such moments, it will be ours to obey; but once such obedience has been rendered, it will be equally our duty to try and see this "new commandment" as continuous with "the law and the prophets" of our past experience—as their fulfilment, as well as their supersession. A notion of barren identity and consistency will, needless to say, never issue is such a vision; and as a protest against a sterile philosophy of the spiritual life Bishop Chandler's cult of the moment is of value. But the truth seems to lie with a synthesis in which the elements both of continuity and of newness find adequate recognition. Each word of God to the soul is the word for the moment, and must not be truncated by a vicious reference to the past; yet it could not be the word for the moment, if it were not rooted in the past out of which that moment sprang, and therefore part of a timeless whole. To cut off the moment from the whole is to introduce a source of weakness and confusion into our interpretation of spiritual experience. In reading recent mystical literature, one is struck not only by its theoretical

anti-intellectualism, but by a certain incoherency and fragmentariness of thought—a loose and invertebrate mental impressionism. On the intellectual side, this literature presents a mere haphazard succession of mental and spiritual *aperçus*—brilliant enough at times, but at best more brilliant than powerful—which robs its devotional appeal of all genuine influence with thinking men. Not least is this apparent where a semi-occult gnosis is made the distinguishing mark of the true mystic.

V

The antagonism between intellect and intuition has been, as we have seen, quite unnecessarily sharpened by certain recent interpreters of Mysticism, who in this way have greatly obscured their true relation and interaction in mystical experience. To begin with, we must bear in mind that the intellectualist of a generation ago, for whom the universe was a problem in Hegelian logic, is dead. At the present stage of the discussion, the most convinced opponent of Mysticism is ready to admit that intuition has a large place in the discovery of truth. Even so doughty a champion of the scientific attitude as Mr. Bertrand Russell admits that "much of the most important truth is first suggested by its means," [1] and goes on to point out that "even in the most logical realms it is insight that first arrives at what is new." [2] He sees "an element of wisdom to be learnt from the mystical way of living, which does not seem to be attainable in any

[1] "Mysticism and Logic," *Hibbert Journal*, July, 1914.
[2] *Ibid.*

other manner," [1] and recognises that even the cautious and patient investigation of truth by the scientist, which seems the very antithesis of the mystic's swift certainty, may be fostered and nourished by that very spirit of reverence in which Mysticism lives and moves." [2]

Representing a widely different philosophical tendency, Professor Croce has recently given us a re-interpretation of Hegel which serves to show that whatever be the gulf between Hegel and, say, Bergson —and one does not wish to minimise any real divergence—it is not to be concluded, as is still the fashion here and there, that Hegel ignored or disparaged intuition. We must not forget that much that passes for intuition is something far less respectable—is, in fact, that " pure " feeling which Professor Flint pertinently defined as " pure nonsense." Nor would Bergson recognise in the intellectual stupefaction and the sentimental self-hypnotisation which some think essential to the mystical attitude that plunging of the self into the Real of which he has so much to say. Father Tyrrell observes somewhere that it needed a new mind to grasp Bergson's doctrine of intuition: it requires no kind of mind whatever to grasp the moist and pulpy sentiment by means of which certain professed disciples think to transplant themselves bodily into the " thickness of the Real." What Bergson demands is the installation of the personality in the movement of Reality. " But," asks Dr. Croce, " was not this just what Hegel demanded

[1] " Mysticism and Logic," *Hibbert Journal*, July, 1914.
[2] *Ibid.*

and the point from which he began—to find a form of mind which should be mobile as the movement of the Real; which should feel 'the pulse of Reality' and should mentally reproduce the rhythm of its development without breaking it into pieces by making it rigid and falsifying it? But for Hegel such a view was only a starting-point, not a conclusion, as it is for Bergson and for others of like tendencies. The renunciation of thought would have been asked of Hegel in vain. To have shown that the demand of concrete knowledge is satisfied under the form of thought is his great merit, his immortal discovery." [1]

It is still the fashion in many quarters to distinguish with William James between the mystical consciousness which gives "direct perception of the invisible," and the non-mystical or rational consciousness "which is based upon the understanding or senses alone"; but such a conception introduces a quite unnecessary rift into the personality. That there are deeper levels of consciousness of which the man who lives only in his discursive understanding little dreams, and that a sudden awakening, or the gentle and persistent knocking of the "Dweller in the Innermost," may throw open a door into a new and larger world, is sound mystical doctrine; but that this implies a double consciousness, or that the consciousness ceases to be rational when it becomes mystical, is a gratuitous assumption which has done more than any other to invalidate the message of Mysticism. It has indeed almost invariably ended in

[1] *What is Living and what is Dead in the Philosophy of Hegel*, pp. 214-215.

betraying the mystic into the old theosophical heresy of postulating a superior order of spiritual facts, unverifiable by the reason and open only to a special mystical faculty whose existence and efficiency must be taken for granted, since it can be subjected to no known tests. In other words, it introduces a rift within the mind, more disastrous both to a true rationalism and to a genuine Mysticism than Kant's opposition between the pure and the practical reason taken at its extremest. In this connection the sober and shrewd observations of M. Récéjac deserve serious pondering. " The most dangerous and lasting of all the aberrations of Mysticism," he points out, " arose from yielding to the inordinate desire to establish the fact of some conscious activity *other* than Reason, imparted by God to the elect only. . . . It would be better for man to remain without that intellectual and moral addition which mystics seek in the Absolute—better for him to go on working as best he can with the innate means at his disposal for the extension of his knowledge and his morals—than to risk the consequences of an imaginary inspiration which did not have the impregnable criterion of evidence and identity. Reason, like life, is only susceptible of inner augmentation by effects immanent to their proper cause . . . the *alteration* of life is death ; the *alteration* of Reason is madness." [1] It is obvious that in a passage such as this, " Reason " is used in the sense of " the real and logical foundation of personality " [2]—that " which makes us the ' one '

[1] *Essay on the Bases of the Mystic Knowledge*, pp. 95, 98-99.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 117.

living and real which we are." [1] God is known not by processes of formal reasoning, but "of the heart," and our most valid intuitions of the Eternal defy logical analysis. But to postulate a special order of facts and a special spiritual sense to apprehend them is to remove Mysticism to an occult sphere, professedly supra-rational but really out of all relation to reason. It is to set up a new world over against the old, instead of creating the new out of the old. Such a procedure can neither explain the old, nor justify the new. It offers something that cannot be judged by any known criterion.

Very much that passes for Mysticism is merely a lust for immediacy. There is, of course, a spiritual immediacy which is the very essence of true Mysticism; but while the mystical experience is in a real sense immediate and creative, it only becomes its true self in as far as it is acted upon by the reflective faculty and related to the rest of our knowledge and experience. Analysis and reflection, so far from stiffening into mortal rigidity what once throbbed with life, reveal a life more abundant and intricately organised, more richly dowered with unguessed heights and depths, than our first intuition ever dreamt of. It must, of course, always be remembered that when we say "intellect" we mean "the intellect of a moral consciousness"—a faculty which, so far from being unable to deal with the great immediacies, not only shares in their apprehension with the will and the emotions, but exercises an interpretative function without which such immediacies could not

[1] *Essay on the Bases of the Mystic Knowledge*, p. 117.

become permanent factors of experience. Professor Bosanquet states this view in its most moderate form. "To say that reality is only to be found in the given and not in its extension and interpretation through thought is surely the vicious folly of naïve realism. If thought had a point of departure foreign to existence, then it would be idle to speak of either generating the other. But the connection of thought and existence, whatever it may be, is not so simply disposed of as this."[1]

We are far too ready to accept such threadbare assertions as that philosophy is incompetent to deal with life. That philosophy has often suffered at the hands of exponents afflicted with "learned stupidity" and unable to grasp what is central and vital in experience is only too true. But to admit that philosophy has often been inadequate to life is one thing; to assert that it is inherently incapable of dealing with life quite another. The latter statement, while aimed at philosophy, really hits "life"; for philosophy is "the formal embodiment of the penetrative imagination; it deals with the significance of things and transforms them, but only by intensified illumination." To say therefore that it cannot deal with life is to deny that life can be thus illuminated—is, in fact, to make *il gran rifiuto*, in which life ignores and disowns its own largest and deepest experiences.

VI

It has been said that intuition is the forerunner of reason. It is quick to perceive, and slow-footed

[1] *The Principle of Individuality and Value*, p. 80.

reason can follow and see the great thing that has come to pass only as intuition takes it by the hand. This is doubtless often the case; but in as many instances intuition comes as the crown and reward of a long process of patient intellectual research. The thinker has beaten his brain long and vainly against an obstinate problem, when suddenly, at the very moment of exhaustion, a flash of intuition reveals the secret.[1] In such cases the heart very often boasts itself against the intellectual with the proud challenge, "I have felt." But when a man says, "I have felt," he opposes, as Sir Henry Jones has so often pointed out, not his feelings as such to the doubts of his mind, but "his personality in the wealth of his experience."[2] And that experience includes the struggle of the intellect which made the intuition possible. Intuition is thus not only "rooted in latent reason," but also the crown of the larger reasoning. For it is only as it is worked upon by the intellect, and transmuted from one of many unrelated moments in a sequence of impressions to a constituent part of an organised world of experience that its real value is made explicit.

Nor must this be taken to mean merely that the raw material of intuition, as it comes to the soul, often with flashing and dazzling suddenness, is *afterwards*, in hours of calmer leisure, submitted to the reflective and interpretative activity of the intellect. Mystical intuition is not something which is isolated

[1] A most lucid and suggestive treatment of the much-neglected distinction between the two kinds of intuition is found in the section on "Bergson" in Professor Höffding's *Modern Philosophers*.

[2] *Cf. Browning as a Philosopher and Religious Teacher*, chap. x.

from the intellect. It is, in fact, *the action of the intellect and the will energising God-ward under the supreme impulse of love.* It is love which is "the true hierophant of the mysteries of God," and "love in its Divine fulness is the unity of will and reason in the highest power of each."[1] We are entirely right in insisting that the true mystic ponders his experience, not with the cold, detached intellect, but with the whole man; that his Absolute "does not withdraw to the heights of the mind, but takes possession of the whole soul."[2] It remains, nevertheless, that in the appropriating activity of the whole consciousness Reason still is "king," not indeed, as swallowing up will and emotion, but as conferring their truest and highest rank upon them. Spiritual reality is apprehended by that faith "which cometh of the natural love of the soul, and of the clear light of our reason, and of the steadfast mind which we have of God in our first making."[3]

Such a burning apprehension transcends mere "understanding" as much as simple intuition. In it the mystic's desire is fulfilled, not by means of a special organ of spiritual vision, but by the interplay of all the faculties fused into one by the higher Reason.[4] This is most characteristically expressed by John Scotus Erigena: "Whoever rises to pure understanding becomes that which he understands. We, while we discuss together, in turn become one another.

[1] W. R. Inge, *Personal Idealism and Mysticism*, p. 6.
[2] Récéjac, *Essay on the Bases of the Mystic Knowledge*, p. 126.
[3] Lady Julian, *Revelations of Divine Love*, p. 132.
[4] *Cf.* Inge, *Personal Idealism and Mysticism*, p. 5: "The higher Reason is that unification of our personality which is the goal of our striving and the postulate of all our rational life."

For if I understand what you understand, I am become your understanding, and in a certain unspeakable way I am made into you. And also when you entirely understand what I clearly understand, you become my understanding, and from two understandings there arises one." [1]

The classic phrase of intuitionalism, M. Gaston Rageot's " to understand in the fashion in which one loves," has been so de-intellectualised by many interpreters as to be no longer an " understanding " at all, but merely a sucking in, as it were, of a fluid mass of impressions. But to love truly, be it God or man, is to love with the *mind*. And thus we find Pascal, for whom thought applied to religion was essentially a passionate activity of his whole being—an *amor intellectualis Dei*—flinging out the striking *dictum* that " love and reason are only one thing. Love is a precipitancy of thought which rushes in one direction without examining every detail, but none the less it is a kind of reason." Whether it be the Νοῦς ἐρῶν of Plotinus, or the " God known of the heart " of Pascal, where " the heart " is understood as " an implicit of Reason and Love," it is, as we have already pointed out, the intellectual element which, by adding light to heat, gives a luminous glow, a convincing passion, a vital logic, to the utterances of the great mystics which no esoteric theosophy or mysticism of " pure feeling " can give.[2]

Once the vital and concrete character of thought

[1] *De Divisione Naturæ*, iv., 8.

[2] *Cf.* a suggestive discussion in Dr. W. M. Macgregor's *Christian Freedom* especially pp. 111-136.

is adequately recognised, the vicious opposition of faith to knowledge, intuition to reason, and the inward to the outward is rendered impossible. In a most characteristic and representative passage, Miss Underhill gives what she holds to be the answer of the true mystic to the Ritschlian objection. "The Ritschlian says in effect, 'We only know Deity as we see It expressed in Christ'—a statement which, if it is to have any meaning at all, seems to demand a highly developed mystical consciousness in those who subscribe to it! The true mystic answers, 'Life, not knowledge, is our aim; nothing done for us, or exhibited to us, can have the significance of that which is done *in* us. We can only know the real in so far as we possess reality: and growth to that real life in which we are in union with God is an organic process only possible of accomplishment in one way—by following in the most practical and concrete sense the actual method of Christ."[1]

Taken in one sense, such a statement is the merest truism; in another, it is an example of vicious antithesis. If "knowledge" be taken in the formal and technical sense, then the Ritschlian excludes it from religious experience quite as unequivocally as the mystic. If, on the other hand, *Love* is the constraining principle of the mystic personality, then there is a Gnosis which, so far from being out of relation to life, is "the very life blood of religion." Nor can it be admitted that the antithesis between what is done for us and what is done in us is valid here. Many of our most truly inward experiences consist in the appro-

[1] *The Mystic Way*, p. 64.

priation and assimilation of what is " exhibited to us " or " done for us." There is no opposition between the inward communications of grace and the mediation of Nature, society, and the thousand and one disciplining and exalting influences which operate upon the spirit from the " outside " world. There is, indeed, no such thing, the introspective mystics notwithstanding, as a purely " inward " experience ; and often what seem the most secret and direct whisperings of the Spirit are in reality mediated by the very influences which the one-sided lover of the inward most disparages. In this connection Mr. Bosanquet reminds us that " the immediate cannot stand. You cannot anywhere, whether in life or in logic, find rest and salvation by withdrawing from the intercourse and implications of life ; no more in the world of individual property and self-maintenance than in the world of international politics and economics ; no more in the world of logical apprehension than in that of moral service and religious devotion. Everywhere to possess *Reality* is an arduous task ; stability and solidity are not in the beginning, but if anywhere only in proportion as we enter upon the larger vistas of things." [1]

It is true, of course, that we can only know the real in as far as we possess reality, but only in the sense that knowledge must be vital, not formal ; and such vital knowledge is, in fact, three-fourths of that possession of reality which is placed in vicious opposition to it. To omit knowledge—in other words, intellectual apprehension—from our vital possession

[1] *The Principle of Individuality and Value*, p. 7.

of reality is to surrender that disciplining and controlling principle which brings our emotional and volitional activities into wholesome subjection to the great realities which are independent of them. To live in a voluntarist universe, where facts are one thing and faith another, is to live in a universe in which Mysticism is possible only by a trick of mental juggling. This is demonstrated wherever a voluntarist creed is taken with any pretence of logical consistency; and so we find Tyrrell escaping from the bitter conclusions of his own philosophy, but not the dry and thorough-going Loisy. Turn it as we will, anti-intellectualism is in the long run the death of Mysticism and in this sense (which, however, is hardly the sense he intended) Professor Oman is entirely right when he says somewhat harshly that Mysticism just exists to save people from real feeling.[1] In these days of the unification of all knowledge and experience, when the whole coherent field of life presents itself to the spiritual pilgrim and he can no longer make a province his kingdom Mysticism must not, at its peril, surrender the heroic conviction that man's higher reason, to quote St. Thomas' characteristic phrase, "participates in the Word in an eminent identity";[2] in other words, that all thought is grounded in the Divine Reason, whose motions can therefore be traced in the normal processes of the mind. To the genuine mystic what is most spiritual is also most truly rational, and it ill becomes him "to make his intellectual faculties Gibeonites." To

[1] *The Church and the Divine Order*, p. 309.
[2] *Summ. contra Gentiles*, I., xli.

degrade our rational powers into hewers of wood and drawers of water to a supposed mystic faculty is to transport ourselves into a world where no known criterion of truth and validity is applicable; where faith becomes credulity, grace magic, vision hallucination. In the Mysticism of the future the speculative and the intuitive elements must once more interact, as they did in the greatest Mysticism of the past. "The fire still burns on the altars of Plotinus," and God is still discerned most surely by "an intellectual touch."

CHAPTER X

MYSTICISM AND THEOLOGY

Mysticism has been the ferment of the faiths, the forerunner of spiritual liberty, the inaccessible refuge of the nobler heretics; the inspirer, through poetry, of countless youths who know no metaphysics; the teacher, through devotional books, of the despairing; the comforter of those who are weary of finitude. It has determined, directly or indirectly, more than one-half of the technical theology of the Church.

JOSIAH ROYCE.

The great service rendered by the speculative mystics to the Christian Church lies in the recognition of those truths which Pantheism grasps only to destroy.

DEAN INGE.

Creation, Redemption, Sanctification are all one and the same indivisible fact. . . . The Death of Him who is Himself eternal God is the final creative act.

C. E. ROLT.

SYNOPSIS

The attitudes of the mediæval and the Protestant Churches towards Mysticism — The Ritschlian influence — Professor Oman on Mysticism as Neoplatonism. I. Professors Schlatter and Haering on Mysticism—Anti-theological bias in recent mystical literature—M. Shuré on esoteric Christianity—The historical value of the anti-mystical movement. II. The reaction against Ritschlianism—The disastrous influence of Ritschlianism upon theology, German and British—Theological *petits-maîtres* and critical mechanics—Canon Scott Holland on Athanasian theology—What is mystical theology? III. The mystical doctrine of God the Redeemer—The *Via Negativa*, an "accident" of Mysticism—Devotion to a personal Redeemer central to Mysticism—Ruysbroeck and Lady Julian on the relation of the believer to Jesus Christ—The acosmism of St. John of the Cross—The relation of Mysticism and Pantheism—The doctrine of God's "becoming" in the cosmic process: Dean Inge's and Professor John Watson's criticisms—The same objections applicable to Incarnation. IV. The constructive principle found in the Christian conception of Redemption—The relation of cosmic to ethical—Redemptive Creation—Neglect of speculative soteriology—The doctrine of cosmic redemption founded on the soul's experience of the Redeemer. V. God's redeeming love His only perfection—The paradox of His redemptive "becoming"—Divine love known to be eternal only when and as perfected by suffering in time. VI. Redemptive immanence the condition of true personality—Union with God a union of love, not of absorption—The struggle with sin real only as viewed *sub specie Christi*. VII. Does mystical theology disparage history?—Dr. W. F. Cobb on Fact and Process—The mystic view Johannine rather than Gnostic—Professor E. F. Scott on the Logos-idea. VIII. *Ne evacuetur crux Christi!*—The mystic's protest against a narrowing historicity—Grace co-extensive with life—The glory of the Cross—Sören Kierkegaard on the popular cult of the Exalted Christ—"The Gnostic Crucifixion"—The Kenotic principle—The essential Christhood of God.

CHAPTER X

MYSTICISM AND THEOLOGY

Speaking broadly and generally, it may be said that up to the Reformation the mystic and the "professional" theologian lived on terms of mutual respect and forbearance, even where they did not work in perfect harmony. The mediæval mystic, who was in most cases a "religious," subjected his characteristic views to the judgment and correction of his "superior" and his "spiritual director," and the ecclesiastics and theologians of that time had a tolerance for speculative thought which we do not generally connect with the "dark" ages. This remained true, to a certain extent, even in the time of the Counter-Reformation. St. Teresa, for instance, submitted her whole intellectual life and outlook to her director and encouraged her sisters to do the same, yet the fine audacity of her meditations and reflections shows no sign of having been "edited" in the interests of conventional Catholic piety or conviction. Indeed, Dr. Alexander Whyte's short "appreciation" contains more of adverse criticism than the whole College of Cardinals would have found to advance against her during her lifetime. But it was the mediæval Church especially which showed a degree of tolerance and a sense of the multi-coloured nature of religious thought and experience

remarkable for that uncompromising age, when white was white and black black, and when the Church had to wage war to the knife against the brute forces which were threatening the spiritual existence of the race.

With the Reformation a new era began. The newborn Protestant Church was acutely suspicious of the very men who had prepared the way for it. With characteristic intemperance, Luther launched volleys of savage and contemptuous invective against men like Carlstadt and Sebastian Franck, whom he took neither time nor trouble to understand. Dean Inge's comment on this attitude of early Protestantism is sufficiently caustic. "Speculative Mysticism," he says, "is a powerful solvent, and Protestant Churches are too ready to fall to pieces without it." [1] Be that as it may—and one could conceive of Churches which would be all the better for a touch of that readiness to fall to pieces—the Reformation initiated a misunderstanding and a hostility between mystic and theologian which persists to this day. Open a German book on theology, and in nine cases out of ten you will find an attack on Mysticism, written very much *sine scientia, necessitate et amore;* and the same holds true of many English writers who have been strongly influenced by the Ritschlian school and whose acquaintance with Mysticism does not reach very far beyond the attractive mis-information derived from such books as Vaughan's *Hours with the Mystics*. There are, of course, many theological writers whose antagonism to Mysticism rests upon

[1] *Christian Mysticism*, p. 196.

far more respectable foundations, and who attack it mainly from the standpoint of an incompatible doctrine of salvation. Yet even in such instances one is now and again assailed by a pardonable suspicion as to the extent and thoroughness of the critic's knowledge of mystical sources. When, for instance, Professor John Oman tells us that "Neoplatonism was Mysticism," and that "to Pantheism God is wholly immanent—all is God; to Mysticism God is wholly transcendent—God is all," [1] we cannot refrain from wondering if such a statement is due to a careless use of the term "Mysticism" when only one variety of the speculative type is intended, or to a somewhat limited acquaintance with mystical literature.

I

The antagonism of most evangelical [2] theologians to Mysticism is directed against an alleged Neoplatonic doctrine of God which leaves no room for the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ—a doctrine involving a non-moral conception of salvation and a view of God's relation to His world which reduces the phenomenal universe to an illusion. Dr. Oman gives characteristic expression to this objection when he says: "It [Mysticism] could only teach men to ignore, and not to inherit, the earth, and it could only efface, not rescue, the distressed moral per-

[1] *The Church and the Divine Order*, p. 170.

[2] The word is here used, of course, in its widest sense, and not in its specialised meaning, as contrasted with "High" or "Broad" Church "Liberal" or "Catholic."

sonality." [1] And this antagonism is by no means confined to those theologians who have been more or less swayed by Ritschlian influences. We find, for instance, so independent and in many ways penetrative a thinker as Professor Adolf Schlatter repeating the unfounded allegations which since the days of Luther have defaced the pages of German theological literature. Dr. Schlatter characterises Mysticism as "inactive," and in a footnote to this phrase defines mystical religion as "a religion which seeks the process by which God is revealed and through which He unites us to Himself solely in the inner life of the individual, denying all religious value to history and Nature." [2] In writing of the Baptism of Jesus and the "sign" which accompanied it, Dr. Schlatter thinks it necessary to go out of his way to attack the "mystical" view which would see in the Dove and the Voice "merely a subjective vision which was the result of a long and deliberate process by which the soul hoped to raise itself to God." [3] One wonders where in all mystical literature Dr. Schlatter has found such a view expressed. What he seems to be thinking of is a mixture of theosophy and laboratory psychology. For all the great devotional mystics, visions came by the grace of God—often when least expected, always without "the will of the creature." Even so perverse an exponent as Miss Underhill has shown herself to be in her book *The Mystic Way* sees at the back of the subjective vision a genuine contact

[1] *The Church and the Divine Order*, p. 172.
[2] *Die Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, vol. i., p. 35.
[3] *Ibid.*, vol. i., p. 470.

with an objective Reality, which the subject "translates" into terms of sight and hearing.[1] Dr. Schlatter returns to his charge in supposing that had the vision of the risen Christ been "subjective," the Church would have degenerated into a coterie of mystics, preoccupied with the attempt "to reproduce in themselves the ecstatic condition in which the disciples saw their risen Lord."[2] It surely takes very slight acquaintance with mystical literature to know that such self-hypnotisation is sternly condemned by all the great mystics. Dr. Schlatter also persists in confounding Mysticism with the Manichæan dualism by which it was so strongly and disastrously influenced, but to which it is at bottom opposed.[3]

In refreshing contrast to most German Protestant theologians, Professor Theodor Haering[4] seeks to do justice to Mysticism and carefully distinguishes between certain theosophical varieties which deny a historical revelation and the authentic type. It is interesting to note that Dr. Haering, in contrasting the swollen complacency of modern mystics with the sober Christian temper of those whom they claim as their predecessors, cites two such problematic magnitudes as H. Hart and Bonus as representatives of the former class, and can only think of Tersteegen in connection with the latter.[5] One is inevitably forced

[1] *The Mystic Way*, pp. 87 *et seq.*
[2] *Die Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, vol. i., p. 563.
[3] *Ibid.*, vol. i., p. 474; vol. ii., p. 470.
[4] Professor Bernhard Duhm is another notable exception. *Cf.* his *dictum*: "Let us say it once and for all, that religion is a mystical thing from beginning to end" (*The Ever-Coming Kingdom*, p. 14).
[5] *The Christian Faith*, vol. ii., 778-782.

to conclude that whatever knowledge of Mysticism the majority of German theologians possess is somewhat curiously derived and severely limited.

British theologians have with notable exceptions neglected Mysticism rather than antagonised it. It is symptomatic, for instance, that such a treatise as Professor H. R. Mackintosh's *The Person of Jesus Christ* takes no cognisance of mystical thought, especially on the cosmic significance of Christ, the only reference to Mysticism being a few remarks upon the dangers of its "unbridled and capricious" varieties, with special emphasis upon the service rendered by Ritschl in bringing such aberrations into discredit.[1]

On the other hand, we find a corresponding antagonism to professional theology—an antagonism often strongly tinged with contempt—among mystics; and this attitude also goes back to the Reformation. If Luther had scant courtesy for the *illuminati* of his day, the so-called spiritual reformers often retaliated with a somewhat irritating assumption of superiority; and when we turn to recent mystical literature, the note of esoteric *hauteur* frequently becomes, as we have seen already, blatant and jarring. In many cases these esoteric scribes treat the work of theological research and Biblical scholarship as altogether beneath the notice of the spiritually minded; and even Miss Underhill, who in *The Mystic Way* has made abundant and suggestive use of theological literature, sees fit to speak of "the platitudinous ethics of modern theology"[2] and to lapse here and

[1] *The Person of Jesus Christ*, p. 378.
[2] *The Mystic Way*, p. 85.

there into an esoteric attitude quite unworthy of her genius.

It is, however, in the pages of a rapidly increasing mystical literature, which, while claiming to be specifically Christian, is essentially a polemic against the historic Christian faith, that we must look for typical examples of a bias which is threatening to provincialise and sterilise the present-day revival of Mysticism. M. Shuré, for instance, in his irritating but none the less interesting study, *The Great Initiates*, speaks of "the childish data of clerical theology," and claims to represent the only true and inward Christianity—"Christianity understanding at last the origin, spirit and import of its own traditions." [1] He is, in fact, a neo-Gnostic, with the Gnostic's characteristic eagerness to be considered, above all things, "a good Christian." In reading his expositions and similar works, such as Mr. W. L. Wilmshurst's *Contemplations*, or Miss J. de Steiger's able and characteristic annotations to her translation of Eckhartshausen's *The Cloud upon the Sanctuary*, we cannot escape the conviction that these writers have but the slightest and most superficial knowledge of the theology they so light-heartedly dismiss as external, not to say childish; and that—what is of more importance—the esoteric wisdom which they propose to substitute for it is neither particularly wise nor excessively esoteric. M. Shuré tells us [2] that for him the Gospels are illuminated by Essenian and Gnostic traditions, and that when they are interpreted in this sense

[1] See *The Great Initiates*, vol. i., Introduction.
[2] *Ibid.*

Christian esotericism will be seen to gush forth like a living spring from the words of the Christ; but we wait in vain for anything genuinely vital to gush forth from the waters which he "troubles" with so skilful a finger. What does gush forth in tolerable abundance is a succession of the merest commonplaces of theological thought and Christian conviction, presented with breathless awe as new discoveries and claimed as the specific fruit of the esoteric spirit. Take these valid and valuable commonplaces away, and we are left with a body of "esoteric science" and theosophical speculation which, while it contains some valuable elements, is nevertheless, taken in its totality, a thousand times more mechanical and puerile than the feeblest specimen of the theology it is intended to replace.

This mutual suspicion and distrust between theologian and mystic—a suspicion and distrust which is, partially at least, the result of ignorance on both sides—bodes ill for a true revival of Mysticism and a genuine development of mystical theology. Let us admit freely that the mystic is the last person in the world who can dispense with the steadying and formative influences that come to him through the work of the philosopher and the theologian. No bread turns more bitter and ashen in the mouth of him who thinks to live by it alone than the manna of mystical intuition; and a Mysticism that would ground its theology upon nothing more substantial than its own unsifted guesses is in danger of being overtaken by moral and spiritual decrepitude and degeneracy. Nor is the loss of the anti-mystical

theologian to be minimised. The anti-mystical bias which has come to be inherent in certain schools of theology has its root in an honourable solicitude for the ethical reality and virility of the Christian conception of salvation over against a conception which exhausts itself in vague philosophemes. It is, in essence, the antagonism of West to East; of Augustinian to Greek theology. And only a very one-sided critic could deny the historical value and necessity of a movement which restored the soul's experience of redemption to its central place, even though it meant the eclipse of what would otherwise have been a most fruitful source of progressive theological thought. But it must always be remembered that the value of what may broadly be termed the anti-Greek movement was *historical*. As always in the development of human thought, it needed a one-sided statement to correct an opposite one-sidedness. To persist to-day in a belated Ritschlianism which rules out the first four centuries of theological speculation as alien to Christianity, and which describes every attempt to transcend the limits of a narrow Hebraic moralism and historicity as a de-ethicising of the Gospel, is to help forward a theological decadence which will affect first and foremost the very doctrine which Ritschl was most anxious to retain.

II

The truth is, we can no longer formulate a doctrine of redemption which does not involve the cosmic

aspect of things without weakening the very position we wish to strengthen, for we can no longer completely sever conscious personality from its matrix of unconscious life, or sin from the larger context of evil in general, without being broken on the wheel of facts. The scientist and the philosopher have made short work of theological bulwarks once believed to be impregnable, and in driving us from their shelter have forced us back upon the cosmic Christology and the mystical doctrine of personality as found in the New Testament. The new race of theologians are less careful than their predecessors to have it understood that the soul's mystical union with Christ has an ethical and not a metaphysical (let alone a biological) significance—as if ethical and metaphysical were mutually exclusive, and matter were impervious to the action of spirit. We are once more nearing the point which F. D. Maurice had reached when, on being asked for the best treatise on the nature of sin, he answered unhesitatingly, "The Epistle to the Ephesians." In other words, we are beginning to see that if we insist upon adopting the Ritschlian expedient of cutting the child in two, we must not be surprised if the half we elect to keep turns out to be as dead as the half we threw away.

This has been abundantly proved in the course of post-Ritschlian theology. The rejection of the metaphysical element has killed theology on its speculative and constructive side, and left us with a host of historians and Biblical critics, most of them working with moralistic and rationalistic preconceptions and prepossessions. We have had historians of dogma

who, starting from the sound fundamental principle that the experience of reconciliation is the fountain of doctrine, proceed to define that experience in terms of a Ritschlian moralism, and rule out of court as aberrations and vicious accretions all theologies whose doctrine of salvation does not conform to their paradigm. We still suffer from the tyranny of certain exponents of the Synoptic tradition, whose characteristically German *Wirklichkeitssinn* is so perfect as to open their eyes to everything except to the great eternal facts which are *the* Gospel. And we have been all too quick to welcome those hyper-efficient mechanics of Biblical criticism who can hear the grass grow and whose ingenious conjectural emendations often betray a quite astonishing lack of historical imagination and spiritual insight. No modest and sane student would seek to minimise the debt we owe to the great Biblical scholars of the past fifty years, but it is nevertheless true that the impulse given to critical investigation by the great pioneers has, *for lack of a correspondingly fruitful impulse in the field of systematic and constructive theology*, gone to produce a generation of *petits-maîtres* of critical detail, whose work lacks spirit and insight and must be classed as a symptom of decadence. It is significant that Germany has produced no great constructive theological force (with the exception of Ritschl himself) since Dorner and Rothe, both of whom were imbued with the spirit of the Greek theology.[1]

[1] Rothe's essentially theosophical bent made him fundamentally akin to the great Greek theologians. Dorner's clear-sighted appreciation of the

And even in England, where the innate theological trend has always been appreciably Athanasian, the Ritschlian influence has largely sterilised theological thought, and driven writers into the barren regions of mere critical *minutiæ* on the one hand and of a shallow popular pragmatism on the other. One need not be blind to the defects of Greek speculation in order to realise the force of Canon Scott Holland's eloquent regret, which might well be inscribed on the walls of every college of divinity until a revival of speculative Christian thought has rendered it unnecessary. "We have lost much," says Canon Scott Holland, "of that rich splendour, that large-hearted fulness of power, which characterises the great Greek masters of theology. We have suffered our faith for so long to accept the pinched and narrow limits of a most unapostolic divinity, that we can hardly persuade people to recall how wide was the sweep of Christian thought in the first centuries, how largely it dealt with those deep problems of spiritual existence and development which now once more impress upon us the seriousness of the issues amid which our souls are travailing. We have let people forget all that our creed has to say about the unity of all creation, or about the evolution of history, or about the universality of the Divine action through the Word. We have lost the power of wielding the mighty language with which Athanasius expands the significance of creation and regeneration, of incar-

Greek theology is writ large over his monumental work on *The Person of Christ*. See especially the sections dealing with St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas; also his interesting monograph, *Augustinus: Sein theologisches System und seine religionsphilosophische Anschauung*.

nation, and sacrifice, and redemption, and salvation, and glory." [1]

There exists a considerable body of literature upon what is called "mystical theology"; but for the most part the term is used to cover the psychology of religious experience and the *askesis* of the inward life, rather than theology in the speculative and constructive sense. To deal with the actual or possible contribution of Mysticism to theological thought within the limits set in such a treatise as this is no easy task. This is partly due to the lack of any systematic work on mystical theology proper, and partly to the fact that theology and philosophy are so closely related that we shall be constantly tempted, in dealing with the former, to enter upon the discussion of philosophical doctrines and tendencies which rightly pertain to the previous chapter but could not conveniently be dealt with there. For the sake of clearness and brevity, we shall confine ourselves to an investigation of the mystical doctrine of redemption, or rather, the mystical doctrine of God the Redeemer.

III

The subject of the mystical doctrine of God is hedged about with difficulty. Owing to their lack of philosophical *technique* and their loose mental and verbal habit, the great mystics are for the most part obscure and self-contradictory in their attempts at doctrinal statement, and it would be quite easy to deduce two diametrically opposed conceptions from

[1] *Logic and Life*, p. vii.

the writings of any one mystic. In most text-books the discussion is confined to a brief exposition and critique of two opposite tendencies in Mysticism—the *via negativa* and the pantheistic tendency.[1] The former, which has its roots in Plato, but which from Dionysius onwards became Asiatic rather than Greek in its expression and resultant temper, is the outcome of a sense of the Divine transcendence run riot. One of its earliest, as well as extremest, expressions is found in Basilides, who says that "we must not even call God ineffable, since that is to make an assertion about Him: He is above every name that is named"—a statement quoted approvingly by St. Augustine. In words familiar to English readers, Hooker voices it when he says: "Of Thee our fittest eloquence is silence, while we confess without confessing that Thy glory is unsearchable and beyond our reach." This negative way of approach to God is really the way of analogy reversed. It proceeds upon the assumption that, since the Infinite is the complete antithesis of the finite, *everything* that can be affirmed of man must logically be denied of God, who can only be described by negatives. Of such a method of approach to God, Edward Caird has well said that he who ascends the mount of the Divine Unity by that sterile path arrives at the summit "with empty hands,"[2] while Professor John Watson characterises it tersely as "a deification of the word 'not.'"[3]

In the opinion of not a few theologians, this negative

[1] For a lucid and masterly discussion of these two tendencies within a small compass see Inge, *Christian Mysticism*, pp. 110-122.

[2] *The Evolution of Theology in the Greek Philosophers*, vol. ii., p. 215.

[3] *The Interpretation of Religious Experience*, vol. i., p. 73.

way is the *whole* of the mystical doctrine of God;[1] and such a view might be easily substantiated from mystical literature, for it is, broadly speaking, true that whenever the mystics attempted the formal expression of their doctrine of God they did so in terms of the *via negativa*. But who would judge the tenor of a spiritual, as distinct from a technical, literature by its formal expressions? At the heart of mystical literature there throbs, as its vital impulse, a sense of God immanent in the world and in the soul, not merely as cosmic Force, but as personal Love; not only as an animating Principle, but chiefly as redeeming Power. However passages might be multiplied that seem to prove the contrary, it remains that the God of the Christian mystic, at any rate, is and has always been a *Person* whom he delights to describe positively and in terms of his own highest and best, and whom, more often than not, he completely identifies with the Saviour Christ to whom his most passionate and personal love is given. Nor is it possible to maintain that this warm, personal relation is the mystic's inheritance of the common Christian faith, while the abstract negative conception is the specifically mystical element. It needs only a very average acquaintance with mystical literature to produce the contrary conviction—that what makes the true mystic is his personal relation to the Lover and Redeemer of his soul; that it is precisely in the convictions which he shares with the Church Catholic that his specific genius finds its most characteristic expression.

[1] *Cf.* passage from Professor Oman quoted on p. 287.

In saying this we do not, however, intend to imply that every Christian mystic is an evangelical believer, or that the conception of the "Divine Dark" of Dionysius had no real influence upon mystical theology. The very reverse is, indeed, the case. But what we contend for, and can never afford to lose sight of, is that the heart of Mysticism—that which makes it a genuine spiritual movement and experience, and not a mere theosophy—is its passionate personal apprehension of Jesus Christ the Redeemer. So far from it being the case, as some critics would have us believe, that the passages in mystical literature which deal with Christ and His redeeming work directly are mere accommodations to ecclesiastical demands, or survivals of a conventionally accepted faith, these passages belong to the most original, inspired and profound expressions of the mystic spirit. For a typical example one need only turn to Ruysbroeck, who, always boldly daring and often profoundly true and suggestive in his accounts of the soul's adventures on the heights and in the abyss of the great luminous darkness of God, is never more so than when he leaves the contemplation of the ineffable Godhead for the expression of the soul's intimate communion with its Saviour. "The first token of love," he says in one of his best-known and most memorable passages, "is that Jesus has given us His flesh to eat and His blood to drink. . . . The property of love is to be always giving and always receiving, and the love of Jesus is hungry and generous. All that He has, all that He is, He gives; all that we have, and all that we are, He takes . . . and the more lovingly we give

to His hunger, the more fully do we possess Him. He creates in us bread to feed Himself. . . . And our life is full of vice, while His is full of grace and glory, all prepared for us, if only we give up ourselves. If our eyes were clear enough to see this eager craving of Christ who hungers to make us whole, nothing could hold us back from rushing into His open mouth. This will seem but foolishness except to those who love and who, so doing, understand."[1] These are not the words of one who, in the midst of an enjoyable contemplation of abstract deity, breaks off reluctantly to throw a sop to the Cerberus of Catholic orthodoxy. And when we turn to that strange and exquisite tractate, *The Book of the Twelve Béguines*, in which he now and again stands upon the outermost edge of thought, gazing deep into that darkness where the reason swings between exaltation and alienation, we find that his most audacious raids upon that abyss are made from the base of the soul's personal relation to the Divine Man Christ Jesus. His writings illustrate in peculiarly characteristic fashion that "dual orientation" which Delacroix has rightly discerned to be a *differentia* of Christian Mysticism. "Christian Mysticism," he remarks, "is orientated at one and the same time towards the inaccessible God where all determination vanishes, and towards the God-Logos. . . . In spite of the sometimes contradictory appearance of absorption in the Father it is, at bottom, the Mysticism of the Son."[2]

Examples might be multiplied. Lady Julian, for

[1] *Flowers of a Mystic Garden*, pp. 69-70.
[2] *Études sur le psychologie du mysticisme*, p. xiii.

instance, that unconscious Neoplatonist who was "led by the logic of the heart straight to some of the speculative doctrines of the philosophical mystics,"[1] refuses any heaven that is independent of Jesus, and violently rejects every suggestion to turn her eyes from the Cross. "Then I had a proffer in my reason," she relates, "as if it had been friendly said unto me: *Look up to Heaven to His Father.* . . . I answered inwardly with all the might of my soul, and said *Nay; I may not; for Thou art my Heaven.* . . . For I would liever have been in that pain till Doomsday than come to Heaven otherwise than by Him . . . meliked no other Heaven than Jesus."[2] And again, when she was shown her soul "so large as it were an endless world," and understood that it was "a worshipful City," she saw in the midst of that City, not the ineffable Godhead into whose dark Being her speculative mind loved to peer, but "our Lord Jesus God and man . . . most worshipful Lord." And while the Godhead "ruleth and sustaineth heaven and earth and all that is . . . the place that Jesus taketh in our Soul He shall never remove it, without end, as to my sight: for in us is His *homeliest* home and His *endless* dwelling."[3]

With the notable exception of St. John of the Cross, who, like Lady Julian and Ruysbroeck, was a Neoplatonist without being a philosopher, and who, unlike them, carried mediæval acosmism to its bitterest logical conclusion, the great mystics—and here we may even include Eckhart in his best moods

[1] Inge, *Christian Mysticism*, p. 202.
[2] *Revelations of Divine Love*, p. 42.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 167.

—based their spiritual edifice upon the corner-stone of the Person of Christ, however imperfectly they may have conceived it. With the vague sentimentalism of being "in tune with the Infinite" they had but little in common, and where they seem to deny the reality of personality both human and Divine, it is oftener than not due to a loose use of contemporary philosophical terminology, and to the disabilities imposed upon them by the defective conception of personality current in their day, and not to any inherently unethical or acosmistic conviction.

But if some critics have identified Mysticism with that *via negativa*, which is its most unfortunate "accident," others have charged it indiscriminately with Pantheism. While, however, it may readily be granted that the extreme form of mediæval realism which was the philosophical atmosphere of the great mystics tended towards true Pantheism, *i.e.*, towards the doctrine of the *equally* perfect manifestation of God in every created thing, Western Mysticism, at any rate, has always been so ineradicably teleological in tendency as to exclude an attitude which beholds God alike in the reverend Brahmin and in the ox. Such an attitude might be logically deduced from certain utterances of the great mystics, notably of Eckhart, and not a few have classed him among thorough-going Pantheists. But Eckhart never dreamed of carrying these stray statements of his to their logical conclusion, and the main trend of his teaching is against a Pantheistic interpretation in the strict sense of the term. It is not too much to say, indeed, that whenever the mystics lay themselves

open to a charge of Pantheism, their attitude, when taken in the larger context of their teaching as a whole and not unfairly deduced from isolated ambiguities, must be described as *Panentheism* rather than as Pantheism. In common with the best Christian thinkers, they believe in the immanence of a transcendent God, their characteristic *differentia* being found in the emphasis they lay upon the indwelling of the Spirit or of Christ in the heart of man, and in the elaboration of a parallelism between the events in the historical life of Jesus and the mystic process by which the new man is born, crucified, buried and risen in every believer. As the life-history of Jesus is, for most mystics, a recapitulation and focussing of an age-long cosmic process, so the inner life of each believer is a recapitulation of the Gospel story. It may at once be granted that such a conception has many weaknesses and dangers, and that Panentheism does not of itself secure the mystic against the pitfalls of Pantheism. Whenever the indwelling of Christ in the heart is conceived of as a substitution of the Divine for the human and there is a consequent loss of true personality, a Panentheistic doctrine may rival the vagaries of the most grossly unethical Pantheism. Here, as at previous stages of our inquiry, it must be borne in mind that Divine immanence is in itself a mere empty phrase which may cover many widely opposed conceptions. It all depends upon who the God is who is worshipped as immanent, and what precisely is meant by declaring Him to be immanent in the universe and in the soul of man.

There is yet another conception met with in mystical literature which may be termed pantheistic, and that is the doctrine which makes the cosmic process in some sense a real "becoming" of God. Dean Inge disposes of this conception by saying that it is "not a philosophy which commends itself specially to speculative mystics, because it involves the belief that *time* is an ultimate reality. If in the cosmic process, which takes place in time, God becomes something that He was not before, it cannot be said that He is exalted above time, or that a thousand years are to Him as one day." [1] Dr. Inge sees the escape from all such systems in the idea of *will* as a world-principle, will being defined not in Schopenhauer's sense, but as "the determination of a conscious Mind." Such a doctrine preserves "the distinction between what is and what ought to be which Pantheism finds no room for, and at the same time implies that the cosmic process is already complete in the consciousness of God, which cannot be held if He is subordinated to the category of time." [2] Professor John Watson deals severely with the same doctrine from a slightly different point of view: "Religion, since it consists in identification with God, does not involve a process from the lower to the higher. God is not a Being who grows in experience, as some recent writers have suggested. Such a conception is the natural complement of the view that God may or must be finite. If God is gradually acquiring new experience, it must be because He is getting better

[1] *Christian Mysticism*, p. 119.
[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 119-120.

acquainted with the true nature of the universe. And therefore the universe as a whole, and not God, becomes the true principle of Reality."[1] Dr. Watson, however, goes on to say that "while we cannot admit that God undergoes a process of development, this does not mean that all process is necessarily denied of Him. There is process, but it is not a process from lower to higher. . . . All process is within God Himself: it is not something that goes on apart from Him, and which He contemplates from without."[2]

But while we may grant the justice of all these objections within certain limits, and admit that the idea of a becoming of God never greatly appealed to the speculative mystics, it may yet be maintained that it is precisely a doctrine of God which, in a carefully safeguarded sense, involves His becoming that is likely to provide us with a starting-point for the mystical theology of the future. If the objectionable features to which exception is taken could be shown to be inherent in every doctrine of God which interprets His relation to His world in terms of a process of becoming, we might well relegate all forms of this conception to the scrap-heap. But such is not our conviction, and it must not be left out of sight that the objections which are levelled against the philosophical conception of a Divine becoming apply also to the evangelical doctrine of a Divine redemption actualised in history. The moment we accept the Pauline principle that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself and hold

[1] *The Interpretation of Religious Experience*, p. 126.
[2] *Ibid.*

that it finds its highest expression in Jesus of Nazareth, we lay ourselves open to the twofold objection that such a doctrine "limits" God and gives to time an absolute value which it does not possess, and that any attempt to escape this double pitfall issues logically in either Unitarianism or Docetism, both of which positions reduce the words "in Christ" to a metaphor. In saying this we do not for a moment intend to imply that the Christian doctrine of a redemption wrought out in history is *equally* open to objection with the so-called Hegelian [1] doctrine of a becoming or coming to Himself of God in the cosmic process, but merely that the same objections have force in both cases. To assert that God became man —*i.e.*, to go beyond the Ritschlian formula, "Christ has for us the value of God"—is to create precisely the same difficulties which made the speculative mystics of past generations so shy of entertaining any doctrine of a Divine becoming.

But these difficulties, we maintain, can be overcome, and the resolving and transcending principle is found in the Christian doctrine of Redemption conceived in the spirit, if not in the letter, of classic mystical theology. We believe that the centre of a new mystical theology destined to leaven and transmute the Christian thought of the future, will be found in the old philosophical conception of a Divine becoming, expressed in terms of the Christian doctrine of Redemption and interpreted by it. But to provide this normative and interpretative principle, a revision

[1] But it may be doubted if Hegel ever intended his doctrine to be construed in this sense. See McTaggart, *Studies in Hegelian Dialectic*, pp. 159 ff.

of our doctrine of Redemption is needed, and our attempts at theological restatement, while firmly based upon the fact of redemptive experience, must aim at relating that experience to all new developments in the realms of scientific and philosophical thought. We can no longer afford either to subordinate our thinking to the latest philosophical and scientific fashions, or to take the high-handed Ritschlian way out of the difficulty; still less may we seek to force every wind of philosophic doctrine to work the apologetic mill. But in proportion as both the servile and the arrogant methods of treating extra-theological thought are abandoned, the need for a hospitable though independent appreciation and for an honourable affiliation and co-ordination of theology with other fields of thought will become all the more apparent.

IV

That our conception of redemption is already in process of revolution seems beyond doubt. As it is increasingly recognised that the Huxleian opposition between the cosmic and the ethical has no foundation in Reality, that the antithesis between Nature and Grace—however useful and important within its limits—is only of relative value, and that it is no longer possible to regard God the Creator and God the Redeemer as if they were two distinct Beings, Christian thinkers are coming to realise that our conception of redemption can no longer be expressed *exclusively* in terms of human sin and salvation. A generation

ago it was the fashion in certain theological circles to give somewhat boastful expression to one's rejection of the doctrine of a "Fall." But in discarding that doctrine not a few discarded precisely the element that gave it permanent value—the conviction of the reality and tragic significance of original sin, and retained the very feature which made it untenable—the habit of regarding human sin as separable from cosmic evil instead of seeing in it the ultimate expression and acutest form of that evil.

Evangelical theology has always stood for the ethicising of philosophical speculation and for a firm insistence upon man's experience of redemption as not only the fontal principle, but also in a sense, the sole content of Christian theology. Its representatives have in all ages tended to reject as empty speculation everything that did not bear directly upon the soteriological problem, as they defined it, and to stigmatise as unethical any conviction which rested upon the unity of the universe. Even at this late day every endeavour to break down that opposition between the cosmic and the ethical, which has so long kept Christian theology from its true birthright, is met by the objection that all such attempts rest upon an arbitrary transference of ethical terms to a region in which they do not and cannot apply.

This objection, however, would only be valid if we proposed to establish the unity of the cosmic and the ethical by means of a species of mental juggling which ascribes to the blind conflict of cosmic forces the same moral value as to the struggles of the soul

that cries out for the living God, and which puts the victory of a natural species over the katabolic tendency of matter and its establishment upon anabolic lines, so to speak, upon the same level as the Parable of the Prodigal Son. But such cosmic sentimentalism has no place in mystical theology as we conceive it. The mystic's doctrine of God is not that of Deity diffused throughout Nature and finding equal expression in the stinging spray of the ocean billow and the bitter craving for God in the troubled human soul, but that of a Father of spirits whose presence is personal and redemptive, whose delight it is to dwell with the children of men, and whose love finds its supreme satisfaction not in the beauty of the earth, but in the conscious, penitent response of the moral personality. Yet as we believe with increasing weight of conviction that the universe is one, so we believe that the redemption which is made explicit in the deliverance of the human soul from its sin and in its reconciliation to its heavenly Father *begins* with the first inscrutable beginning of that continuous act of creation which has won and is winning chaotic material forces to harmony and order, and subduing the earth to fruitfulness and beauty. The cosmic is not the ethical, Nature is not Grace: they are the *raw material* of moral evolution and redemption. The cosmic process cannot be understood apart from the salvation of the sons of God upon which it depends.

It will be seen at once that such a doctrine of cosmic redemption, so far from being allied to sentimental Pantheism, is sharply opposed to it; for its whole

bent is teleological: it construes its doctrine of immanence, not in terms of what is, but in terms of what *ought to be* and *shall be*. It is here that the doctrine of the birth of Christ in every human soul, which has at times exercised so confusing an influence upon mystical speculation, comes to its own.[1] Its practical religious value is simply this—that the immanence of God as held by Christian Mysticism is the immanence of a *Saviour* struggling to be born within the soul, *i.e.*, pleading with the soul against its sin and wooing it into the loving surrender of filial obedience. Professor Watson, in his often acute but not always just critique of Mysticism, opposes to what he considers the innate tendency of Mysticism to abolish the distinction between the human and Divine a doctrine of immanence conceived as man's conscious self-identification with God.[2] But such a doctrine is in reality not far removed from the true mystical conviction which states the Divine immanence not exclusively in terms of the completed *act* of self-identification, but certainly in terms of the whole, long *process* by which the Redeemer woos the soul into conscious surrender to Him and union with Him. It sees the beginning of the "sweet, long patience" of God in the meek influence which divided light from darkness; in that Love which constrains the stars. The words "Let there be light" were spoken not merely to the lights of heaven, but to the smoking flax of the unborn human soul.

[1] For a most informing discussion of this doctrine, consult W. R. Inge's *Christian Mysticism*, pp. 183-194, and especially Appendix C on "Deification."

[2] *The Interpretation of Religious Experience*, vol. ii., pp. 125-126.

In brief, the mystic believes in *Redemptive Creation*. Unlike the Pantheist, who looks with complacency upon every created thing as the very expression of God, the genuine mystic, while he has often used pantheistic phraseology and so obscured his real meaning, sees God patiently moulding all created things out of their imperfection, discord, and blind cruelty and evil into that which they shall be when the salvation of the sons of God is manifest. He does not, as so many critics accuse him, take his stand upon Nature and develop a more or less sentimental theory of cosmic redemption. He takes his stand upon his personal experience of redemption in Christ Jesus and, viewing the cosmic process from the only point from which it can be rightly estimated, *i.e.*, from its fulfilment in the salvation of mankind, sees it as part of God's redemptive purpose and activity.

It is still the fashion, even where the right of theological speculation is admitted, to relegate all passages in the New Testament bearing upon the cosmic aspect of Christ's redemption to the penumbra of thought—to that nebulous borderland which defies the explorer. This neglect of what may be called speculative soteriology is a survival of the Ritschlian vogue, and derives an apparent justification from the arrogance of a theosophy which opposes its guesses to rational knowledge in the name of a Heaven-born occult wisdom. But it must not be forgotten that while an apotheosis of unreasoned intuition puts the ban of sterility upon all thought, it yet remains true that the most profound and influential doctrines first came to inspired men as

intuitions which they had not the requisite knowledge to ground in reason, and that many such intuitions have remained mere intuitions, simply for lack of being reasoned out by subsequent generations. We are still far too quick to assert that such and such a *theologoumenon* cannot be verified by experience. What precisely do we mean by "experience"? If we define it in narrowly moralistic terms, then our sense of communion and union with the risen and exalted Christ immediately falls into that negligible penumbra of thought—as was always held, indeed, by consistent Ritschlians. But if we believe not only in a historical, but also in a "pneumatic" revelation and mediation of truth and grace, then we must surely admit that such intuitions as those relating to Redemptive Creation, so far from being antagonistic or even unrelated to the experience of a historically mediated redemption, are its inseparable corollaries. Like St. Paul and the writer of the Epistle to the Ephesians, the true mystic knows Christ to be the Source of all existence, the Pulse and Soul of the Universe, and the Bond in which all things consist, *because* he has known Him first as the Redeemer of his personal life.

Mystical theology, then, if consistently developed, must include a doctrine of Cosmic Redemption; and that not merely because it rests upon a Logos-philosophy which demands such a doctrine (certainly not because it aims at harmonising its intuitions with science), but because, like evangelical theology, it is based upon the soul's experience of redemption and is nothing else than an endeavour to give rationality

and context to that experience. Now every truly vital experience includes a number of deductions and corollaries which are the necessary development of its own inherent dialectic; and while such deductions may belong to the penumbra of thought in the sense of being *undeveloped*, this does not justify the thinker in neglecting them and so limiting and truncating the experience out of which they arose. In all ages redeemed souls have seen the universe in terms of redemption, and in so conceiving it have not only found themselves in possession of the master-principle which solves the dark enigma of the groaning and travail of creation, in as far as it can be solved by finite minds, but have also known a great deepening and enrichment of their personal experience of redemption in Christ Jesus.

V

Here lies the parting of ways. The time has passed when we could rule the interpretation of the age-long cosmic process out of the sacred pale of theology and relegate it to the secular realm of metaphysics, and the question before us is, Shall we conceive of that process in terms of redemption, or shall we continue to interpret it in terms of natural law as popularised by nineteenth-century scientists and apologists? Shall we find the key to the riddle of the universe in the sinner's experience of a redeeming Saviour, or in a theology which practically uses the categories and the method of Haeckel to establish its "defence" of God's good and wise government of the universe? The crucial weakness of popular religion

and of a certain type of popular apologetics which, while it rarely finds its way into books, is still far more widely prevalent than one cares to think, must be sought for in a doctrine of God which defines His omnipotence, omniscience, and justice in terms derived from Nature rather than in terms of His redeeming love in Christ Jesus, and makes Him little more than physical force personalised and endowed with an occult justice which cannot be reconciled with any known standard of moral values.[1]

God, then, according to the implications of all truly mystical theology, created the world by His redemptive power. In other words, His creative activity is none other than the redeeming Love which subdues chaos to order, brings good out of evil, and woos foolish, sinful human hearts to filial obedience. The Creator is the Saviour, and His creative *fiat* is the first act of redemption, as His giving His Son to be our very Brother is the crowning act of creation. For Him to create was to enter into His creation, wearing its sorrows as a garment, its joys as a crown of glory—nay, far more, thrilling with its joy and dying upon its bitter cross. This is Pantheism, if one wishes to call it so; but, be it remembered, it is a Pantheism which teaches not the diffused immanence of a World-soul that finds Its adequate and natural expression in the mingled beauty and terror of things, but the immanence of a Personal Redeemer. Such immanence finds its full realisation in the indwelling of

[1] For a most original and suggestive restatement of the problem of Divine omnipotence, marred only, in our view, by a defective conception of the true significance of Force, see C. E. Rolt, *The World's Redemption.*

Christ, or of the Holy Spirit, in the human soul, and can only be explained in terms of that indwelling. And in so far as He is immanent in His creation as its Redeemer and has made this redemption explicit in the human life and death of Jesus, in so far the cosmic process must be construed by the mystical theologian as a becoming of God.

The subject is beset with difficulties which no degree of theological or philosophical acumen will ever surmount, but our common Christian experience suggests a line along which something like a doctrine of the becoming of God may gradually be established. The most common objection to such a doctrine is, as we have already seen, that it militates against the complete and utter perfection of One who is beyond all processes of time and change. But what is this perfection of God for the Christian consciousness? It is nothing else than His redeeming love, and it is of the very essence of that love that it should subject itself to all the conditions under which its object groans and labours. It is only in doing this that it becomes what it is. And so mystical theology teaches as its fundamental doctrine, implicit though often unrecognised in all mystical experience and all mystical literature, that since the only perfection and omnipotence of God is His love, He must attain to that perfection by means of that sacrifice, struggle and bitter anguish. It is only when perfected by suffering, *and as so perfected*, that the love of God is known as unchangeable and eternal, beyond discord, imperfection, evil, and all the antinomies of temporal existence—the everlasting, immutable, and all-inclusive

Reality. To assume a redemptive becoming of God is not, as Dean Inge holds, to give a fictitious and exaggerated value to time. Time is but one of the conditions under which the enduring love of God is shown to be eternal. Time is not independent of eternity: it only exists because God is above it, and because through it eternity is realised. So matter also, while having no beginning in time, is not conceived as eternal by the mystic who has escaped from Manichæan dualism, but as dependent upon the existence of God, and as one of the means through which that Eternal Existence is realised.

All such objections tend to lose much of their force when applied to the endurance of pain by the Redeemer. That God should pass through time seems untenable to many who make no objection to the idea of His being afflicted with the pain and anguish of His human children. Yet in both cases the experience, if it is to have any reality at all, must leave the Divine Experient as He could not have been without such experience—must, in fact, involve in this sense a *becoming;* and the first case is, after all, only the generalised form of the second. We ask, then, Is it really more difficult to reconcile God's eternity with His experience of temporal process than it is to reconcile His perfect and immutable bliss with His subjection to the bitter anguish of suffering love? We imagine it to be so, but that is only because we have learned to deal with the specialised form of the problem, which falls within the province of experimental religion, while we have got into the habit of relegating its more general form to the barren region of

metaphysics. We readily recognise that the eternal and unchanging happiness of God consists not in the absence of pain, but in its overcoming and in its transmutation into joy; and how can pain be thus transmuted except by being experienced in its untransmuted form by the Divine Redeemer? But if it be permissible to count God's endurance of human pain as not merely compatible with, but, as it were, the very stuff of His eternal joy—that by which He realises the bliss which was His from all eternity—it is surely not less reasonable to believe that His passing through the processes of time is a becoming of what He is from everlasting to everlasting.

In this lucid yet ever-baffling paradox mystical theology finds an approximate formulation of what is the very secret of the universe. And here, too, we may seek for the grounding and justification of our own struggle with sin and evil. The weary controversy between what is still broadly called Hegelian Intellectualism and what has come to be known as Activism centres for the religious soul in the question, Has human history a value for God? Intellectualism of the extreme and *doctrinaire* type has not unfairly been charged with reducing all history to the mere "reading of the cosmic novel," the mere making explicit of what is already there implicitly; in fine, with depriving the human struggle of all ethical value. Activism, on the other hand—in many of its forms, at least—may be charged with ascribing to the events of history a value which they cannot possibly have, and with ultimately reducing the Absolute to the chief actor on the human stage—*primus inter pares*.

The solution must be looked for in the direction of a redemptive becoming of God. If God can only attain to His Eternal Perfection by passing through time—nay, if His subjection to temporal processes be the supreme condition and the very substance of His Immutable Being—then human becoming has found an impregnable ground and justification in the very Being of God. Then both the gradual achievement of victory over sin by the redeemed soul and its timeless justification and stainlessness in the sight of God are made eternally real. Man, too, has to achieve that which he is already, and to view him perfect and victorious beyond time and change is to see him as having washed his robes and made them white in the Blood of the Lamb—in other words, to eternalise, and not to destroy, the importance of his struggle with sin. The temporal struggle *is*, in a very real sense, the eternal reconciliation.

VI

These are, of course, only tentative hints, offered with the utmost diffidence as lines of fruitful discussion to which the implications of Mysticism invite the theologian—lines of discussion which seem to hold out promise of at least a partial solution of many intractable problems. The question of the reality of human personality, for instance, may, we think, be rewardingly reconsidered in the light of mystical theology. Mysticism has always been charged with seeking to absorb human personality in the Divine, and so to destroy the reality of the human will and ultimatety of all moral striving. To revert once more

to Dr. Oman's characteristic criticism, "it could only efface, not rescue, the distressed, moral personality." And, as Professor Watson justly points out, Mysticism where it is not modified by the positive Christian consciousness, constantly tends towards the obliteration of the distinction between the human and the Divine personalities, and thus, in its very eagerness to preserve the unity of God, only succeeds in destroying it; for consciousness of God is inseparable from consciousness of self.[1] But if we believe that all created things exist only because God exists, and that their significance is found in the fact that through them He realises His uncreated and timeless Perfection, which is nothing else than Redeeming Love made victorious, then in making human existence as relative to the Divine we really postulate its timeless significance.

The problem of human personality is a vast and intricate one, but we submit that at least a clue to its solution may be found in the central experience of Mysticism. The mystic who has made the dread descent into his own heart and, having touched that Hidden Ground which is both very God and truly himself, says, "I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me," realises thereby that his complete dependence upon God guarantees his inalienable individuality. It is in virtue of his dependence upon One who is Absolute and Eternal that man, too, partakes of the Absolute and Timeless. His relativity secures his absolute value. The magic words "In Christ" contain at once the confession of his complete depend-

[1] *The Interpretation of Religious Experience*, vol. ii., p. 253.

ence and the assertion of his individual persistence beyond all time and change. His God-consciousness, or rather his Christ-consciousness, is the measure of his truest and highest self-consciousness.

Or the problem may be stated thus: How can God be immanent in man and man preserve his individuality? There is, of course, a Neoplatonic and Pantheistic doctrine of Divine immanence which is the virtual negation of all true human individuality; but if immanence be construed in terms of redemption, then so far from "effacing" the distressed moral personality, it comes to its rescue as no other doctrine can. For redemptive immanence is but the other side of redemptive transcendence, and He who is so deep within us is by that very fact of immanent love infinitely high above us. So St. Augustine cries out, "Where did I find Thee, except within myself?" correcting himself swiftly with, "or rather, in Thyself above me." It is in the humility of the indwelling Christ that the transcendent majesty of the Holy One is discerned. And redemptive immanence is also the other side of that conscious self-identification with God which is the essence of evangelical conversion. It is the condition of man's true personality; for just as the individual would not be self-conscious at all but for his relations to his fellows, so it is only in God that man can achieve spiritual personality. Human individuality and freedom, so far from being incompatible with Divine immanence, are its indispensable conditions. The more free and reasonable two self-conscious beings are, the more inward and intimate will be their interaction and their influence upon each

other. Mysticism of the genuine type has always set its face against a doctrine of the Divine indwelling which made God a gigantic hypnotist. Of passages which describe the soul as being "swallowed up" of God there are many in mystical literature, it is true; but, taken in its totality, the teaching of the best mystics is against any such absorption. One need not adduce even a single passage in proof of this: it is sufficient to remember that the science and method of Mysticism is *love*, and love, to be in any sense real, presupposes two distinct and free personalities. In love alone dwells reason—nay, love is reason "heated into that intense and burning passion in which it becomes most truly itself." And in it two persons, distinct yet indissolubly one by something far more intimate and vital than mere ethical harmony of will and purpose, seek to lose themselves in each other, only to find in the beloved one the Self which is not self. The soul—supposing such could exist—that is impervious to and incapable of interpenetration and permeation by another is incapable of true self-consciousness, bereft of the gift of personality.

It must be admitted that even Christian mystical literature has at all times been infected here and there with an Asiatic doctrine of absorption in the Divine which seems to bear out the popular accusation that Mysticism makes for the destruction of personality, and therefore of all true ethics. The full significance of this doctrine, which in the writings of Christian mystics is veiled in conventional religious phraseology, emerges in the utterances of Eastern writers. Thus Zeb-un-Nissa offers a tribute of

envious praise to the moth lured to destruction by the flame:

> "How strong thou hast become, O moth, how great,
> Worshipping thus the flame! this is thy fate—
> Vainly to love and die, yet thou canst bear
> The burning sparks and ever scorn despair.
> Thou knowest, fluttering nearer to the fire,
> In death thou shalt be one with thy desire."[1]

And even Rabindranath Tagore, in whom East and West so strangely mingle and react upon each other, is incurably stricken with the longing for a union which is really destructive of all union. "O my Sun, ever glorious!" he sings, "Thy touch has not yet melted my vapour, making me one with Thy light. . . . If this be Thy wish and if this be Thy play then take this fleeting emptiness of mine, paint it with colours, gild it with gold, float it on the wanton wind and spread it in varied wonders. . . . And again, when it shall be Thy wish to end this play at night, I shall melt and vanish away in the dark."[2]

If this really represented the doctrine of mystic union with God—and the numerous passages in Ruysbroeck, the *Theologia Germanica*, William Law, and countless other mystics who craved for a union of the soul with God in which there should be no "me" and "mine" could fairly be construed in this non-moral sense—then we might well regard Mysticism as essentially hostile to the soul's highest interests. Then, too, the charge of a vague and sentimental conception of salvation as a cosmic romance in which

[1] *The Diwan of Zeb-un-Nissa*, p. 58.
[2] *Gitanjali*, pp. 74-75.

the swift leap of the tiger upon its prey is equated with the sudden rioting of passion in the veins of undisciplined manhood, and the darting of a moth into a candle is placed on a level with the soul's flight into the bosom of its God, would be proven to the hilt. But, as we have seen already in our consideration of the mystic's relation to Nature, such a charge is unfounded, for while he may broadly be said to view Nature as not separate from but including man, this does not exhaust his attitude. Merely to include the noblest attributes of humanity together with the most savage instincts of the brute under the term "Nature" is, after all, only to convert the consistent hell of a "Nature red in tooth and claw" into a confused and irrational jungle of mutually neutralising elements—a chaotic ferment from which one can draw diametrically opposite conclusions, according to one's temperamental affinity. For the Christian mystic, Nature does *not* merely include man: it tends towards man, and ultimately towards the perfect Man Christ Jesus.[1] In man, Nature, as it were, recognises not merely her original purpose and final destiny, but her source and animating impulse—that which, hidden in her womb, made her what she was and explains her age-long travail. For the mystic, man is the index to Nature. In man's redemption Nature is being redeemed, and in redeemed humanity is the justification of all her evil and woe, the reconciliation of all her antinomies.

Here lies the safeguarding of Mysticism against a

[1] *Cf.* John Pulsford's fine phrase, "The pulse of Nature beats manward" (*The Supremacy of Man*, p. 170).

doctrine of evil and sin which, in order to escape from dualism, would reduce them to an illusion. Evil and sin are there not to be annihilated, but to be transmuted by the alchemy of redeeming Love. And to come within the scope of that redeeming Love, the blind evil of the cosmos must come to consciousness in man as *sin*. In man the dim, inarticulate struggle between order and chaos, beauty and ugliness, gentleness and brutality, self-sacrifice and self-seeking has become aware of itself. In the microcosm of humanity the serpent and its Bruiser meet at last on common ground. In other words, the Christian mystic, while refusing to view good and evil as equally absolute and independent forces pitted against each other, sees the reality and exceeding sinfulness of sin in its very dependence upon a righteous God who denies and condemns it, and, still more, in the death of a Divine Redeemer. He views it, not *sub specie æternitatis* as an illusion, but *sub specie Christi* as that which redeeming Love, by suffering unto death, has transmuted. To him, therefore, the grim and bitter conflict between right and wrong is the method by which good overcomes and transmutes evil—*is*, in fact, the victory of good over evil. Individual mystics of all ages have irritated thoughtful and deep-going souls by exhibiting the facile optimism which attains bliss by closing its eyes to evil. But genuine Mysticism is not so shallow a thing. Its undying hopefulness and calm come not from ignoring sin and evil, but from interpreting them *in terms of redemption*. To view sin apart from the Redeemer-God is to see less than Reality.

VII

Another common charge against a doctrine of salvation which includes an interpretation of redemption in terms of the cosmic process is that it denies the supreme value of history: that it substitutes ideas for facts, speculation for revelation, and metaphysical enquiry for religious experience. Mystics have been somewhat impatient of this objection, which is far more securely grounded in the nature of things than they have been willing to admit, standing, as it does, for the reality of redemption over against the abstractions of a high and hollow rationalism. In many of its aspects, however, the objection is merely a stubborn revival of the Ritschlian prejudice against metaphysics, and stands not so much for the historical mediation of eternal facts as for the denial of the ideas behind those facts. And ultimately it rests upon the old, vicious opposition between "fact" and "theory," and the controversy resolves itself into logomachy of a most irritating type. When, for instance, the rigid defender of the exclusive rights of history opposes the "fact" of Christ's crucifixion to the "theory" or idea of God's eternal self-immolation upon the altar of the cosmic process, what does he really mean by "fact"? Obviously not the bare event of the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth under Pontius Pilate. Concerning facts in this naïve sense, Lessing was surely right when he contended that no eternal truths could be deduced from accidental happenings, and Dr. Bosanquet justly observes that history is "a hybrid form of experience, incapable of

any considerable degree of 'being or trueness.'" [1] But it is not in this sense at all that the upholder of a historical revelation regards facts. In common with the mystic, he recognises that if a historical fact has an eternal value, it is because it is far more than historical. When he says "Christ crucified" he means that conviction and experience of redeeming Love made possible by the Cross of Christ—the whole body of evangelical doctrine by which the Church lives. He means, in fact, the "theory" which, so far from being separable or opposed to the "fact," *is* the fact. He may, and generally does, disparage the doctrine of an eternal process behind the Cross, imperfectly manifest in the cosmos and becoming explicit in the life and death of Jesus; but his doctrine of the "fact" of the Cross nevertheless includes a process beginning with Calvary and culminating in a redeemed humanity and a new creation. The term "process" has a somewhat different connotation for him from that which it has for the mystic, but this does not weaken our contention that when he speaks of "fact" he means a good deal more than the bare event; that, indeed, he unconsciously formulates a whole philosophy when he enunciates what he would call his "simple" Christian conviction. The Christian mystic, on the other hand—providing his Mysticism be really dominated by his Christian conviction—when he expresses his belief in a great redemptive process of which the life and death of Jesus are the most perfect actualisation, does not, as so many think, declare thereby that the process is the all-important thing and

[1] *The Principle of Individuality and Value*, p. 79.

the fact a mere illustration. For Christian Mysticism the fact reveals the process ; but for the central, pivotal, organising fact of the Christian Gospel, to talk of process would be the merest chimera of speculation. Fact and process are indissolubly connected, and the most mystical soul that ever found anchorage by turning from the crucified Jesus to the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, and from a Christ who loved us and gave Himself for us to a Christ in us the hope of glory must, by sheer compulsion of common-sense logic, admit that it is only *as a deduction from historical fact* that the doctrine of an eternal process can have any real and concrete value. Dr. W. F. Cobb puts the inter-relation of fact and process with admirable good sense when he says, "That soul should subsist without manifesting itself in formal acts, or that actions, on the other hand, should come from nowhere and have no process behind them are equally incredible propositions." [1] The mystic may place the weight of emphasis upon the process which energises through the fact, but it is only *as* energising through the fact that the process becomes part of his experience ; and this has always been recognised by the best mystics, whose most characteristic experiences and intuitions originated, as we have tried to show already and under various aspects, in their reverent and passionate apprehension of the great historical facts of the Gospel.

A great deal has been made of the mystic's insistence upon the inwardness and incommunicability of his experience—an insistence which is commonly con-

[1] *Mysticism and the Creed*, p. 9.

strued into a disparagement of a historical revelation. And it must be granted that not a few mystics fell into an exaggerated and unwholesome subjectivity, opposing the Word of the indwelling Christ, spoken in the secret places of the soul, to what they tended to look upon as the exoteric teaching of the Gospels and "milk for babes." But a really careful and *contextual* reading of the great spiritual autobiographies which form such an important part of mystical literature will not fail to show that in actual practice this tendency was held in check by the constant linking up of those private and personal intimations with the common facts and teachings of the Catholic faith. Thus Blessed Angela of Foligno, even in the midst of her most daringly subjective flights, insists upon the necessity of "a constant consideration and a profound knowledge of Christ crucified." [1] Her whole spiritual edifice is founded upon her deep and continuous contemplation of the literal facts of the poverty, humiliation and bitter suffering of Jesus, without any of the attempts to spiritualise and allegorise which are deemed to be so characteristically "mystical."

We may contend, then, that while it is true that many mystics were guilty of an exaggerated inwardness and individualism—partly the natural reaction against an externalised Catholicism, partly the inevitable result of a defective conception of personality—and that it withheld from them the great fruitful impulses which can come to the individual believer only through the Christian *ecclesia*,

[1] *The Book of the Divine Consolation*, p. 42.

this individualism was counteracted by their contact with the Christ of history and of common Christian experience. If they cut themselves off from the branches, they abode in the Vine in whom all branches live; and if they failed to appreciate the Church militant, they often showed an all the more vivid and profound realisation of the great cloud of witnesses. Thus Thomas Traherne, speaking of man's power to "see into all ages," says: "The present age is too little to contain it [the human understanding]. I can visit Noah in his ark, and swim upon the waters of the deluge. I can see Moses with his rod, and the children of Israel passing through the sea; I can enter into Aaron's tabernacle and admire the mysteries of the holy place. I can travel over the Land of Canaan and see it overflowing with milk and honey. I can visit Solomon in his glory . . . and admire the magnificence of his kingdom. . . . But above all these our Saviour's Cross is the throne of delights."[1]

The relation of the great Christian mystics to sacred history was by no means that of the Gnostics, or even of Origen: it was essentially Johannine. They used it as the writer of the Fourth Gospel used the Synoptic tradition. Their communion was with the Eternal Christ, and had they been asked if they regretted not living in Gospel times, they would doubtless have answered that there was nothing in the four Gospels one-half as wonderful as the unrecorded sayings of the Eternal Christ, spoken daily in the secret temple of their heart. Yet they never failed to recognise that Exalted and Living One as

[1] *Centuries of Meditation*, p. 38; see also pp. 210-211.

" this same Jesus " who walked in Galilee and was crucified on Calvary. The very thing which is supposed to constitute their disparagement of history—their easy passage from the Christ of the Gospels to the " pneumatic " Christ, without seeming even to be conscious of any transition—is their supreme tribute to the eternal value of history. Theirs was the only true philosophy of history—that spiritual appropriation which incorporates it vitally into the timeless present. That they erred formally in their conception of the value of historical fact cannot be denied, though it must always be remembered that one-half of their apparent neglect or vicious manipulation of history was common to an unscientific age. But their religious use of history amply compensated for all theoretical defects.

It is often objected that, after all, mystical Christology does not spring from evangelical experience at all, but is due to the influence of an alien Logos-philosophy, and to a vicious attempt to force specifically Christian intuitions into its mould. This view is ably represented by Professor E. F. Scott, in his thought-provoking monograph on the Fourth Gospel In summing up the Johannine use of the Logos-category, he says that the adoption of the Logos-idea involved the evangelist " in a mode of thought which is alien to his deeper religious instinct. . . . On the one hand, he conceives of Jesus as manifesting God to men and raising them to a higher life by the might of His ethical personality. On the other hand, he is compelled to think of the revelation under metaphysical categories. . . . The Gospel wavers

throughout between the two parallel interpretations of the life of Christ—that suggested by the history and that required by the Logos-hypothesis. Superficially the two conceptions are blended together; but they cannot be brought into any real harmony. The doctrine of the Logos, born of philosophical theory, has nothing to do with the historical revelation in Jesus, and is wholly inadequate to explain it.[1]

One imagines that a large majority of modern theologians who have been influenced by German masters would agree to this; but are the assumptions upon which such a view is based as unquestionable as their supporters claim? That the Fourth Evangelist could not harmonise his experience of a living, Divine-human Redeemer with a Logos-philosophy bequeathed to him by Philo few would care to deny. But does this admission settle anything? Does it prove that *no* Logos-philosophy can ever be the metaphysical expression of the Christian experience? It must be remembered that, owing to the ascendancy of Latin over Greek theology in the fifth century, and the consequent diversion of the whole trend of Christian thought from the doctrine of the Logos, that doctrine was never developed; and only the rise of a new Christian Platonism, such as Professor Troeltsch desiderates, could reveal whether the Logos-conception is capable of interpreting the great Christian facts or not. To deny that it can prove an interpreting medium, simply on the ground of the obvious circumstance that the early Christian writers necessarily lacked the philosophical acumen to restate

[1] *The Fourth Gospel: its Purpose and Theology*, pp. 174-175.

it in terms of Christian thought, and therefore presented a composite edifice whose stones would not hold together, is surely an unconvincing procedure.

VIII

Once more we come back to the mystic's personal relation to his crucified Redeemer as the mainspring of his attempts to formulate his intuitions, however largely philosophical influences may have gone to decide the terms of these formulations. It was no theory of the Logos, for instance, that caused Traherne to see the Cross as "that Centre of Eternity, that Tree of Life in the midst of the Paradise of God,"[1] and the whole world sprinkled with the Blood of Christ;[2] or that inspired William Law, following in the footsteps of Jacob Boehme, to see Jesus as the Light of that Eternal Nature which was before all creation.[3] It was rather their experience of a Christ who, in coming to them as the Lover and Redeemer of their souls, smote them with the conviction that He who healeth the broken in heart can be none other than He who telleth the number of the stars; that the Lord who openeth the eyes of the blind is He who made the eye and all the beautiful world it loves to look upon, and that the Cross of Calvary was also the ground-plan of the Great Architect of the Universe. To assert less than that would be a grave error, not because it would fail to satisfy the demands of a Logos philo-

[1] *Centuries of Meditation*, p. 39.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 42.
[3] *An Appeal to All Who Doubt*, p. 54. *Cf.* Boehme's *De Signatura Rerum*, chap. xiv.

sophy, but because it would take away from the glory of the Cross—it would deplete it, emasculate it. *Ne evacuetur crux Christi!* is the unspoken aspiration of the mystic heart, and St. Paul would, one likes to think, be the last to deny the validity of this application of his classic utterance.

To sum up, Mysticism bids us remember that we deplete the Cross of Christ when we treat it merely as an event in history with tremendous and eternal consequences. Behind the Christ crucified on Calvary is the Lamb that was slain from the foundation of the world. To conceive or preach Calvary in the sense of a narrow historicity is to rob the Cross of a glory which St. Paul was quick to perceive and which the deep heart of the Fourth Evangelist discerned so piercingly. All conceptions of the Atonement which make the historical act of the Crucifixion a more important and crucial thing than the vast, eternal self-donation of God which lies behind it, are not so much an obscuring of the loving Fatherhood of God as a spoliation of the very Cross they intend to exalt. It is only on the prehistoric rock of Eternal Love that the crucified Son of Man can truly be lifted up from the earth.

Nor dare we limit the Cross to the sphere which conventional theology has assigned to Grace. What is true in the realm of Grace must be true—though the mode and measure of its truth may not be revealed to us fully—in the realm of Nature. If the Cross that was reared on Calvary saves the lost and ruined soul of man, it is because it is the very ground-plan of the universe, the foundation of the house of

life, stretching from star to star, linking unborn worlds in the anguished embrace of its passion. The Law of Gravitation is not so deeply scored on the heart of Nature as the Sign of the Cross. It is the pull of the Cross that makes the whole creation groan and travail in pain together until now. The Cross has blazed its trail across all life. "Turn to the heights," exclaims Thomas à Kempis, "turn to the deeps, turn within, turn without—everywhere thou shalt find the Cross!" If it were not so, the city missionary and slum evangelist would know their message hollow and empty in the act of uttering it. Only a Cross that links a universe of worlds and reconciles abyss to abyss can save "Old Born Drunk." That the city missionary is probably unaware of this wider context matters not the least; the wisest of us reck little of the things by which we live. If Grace is to be anything more than a theological catch-word, it must be co-extensive with life; and to make it thus co-extensive is not to belittle its supreme manifestation in Christ Jesus, but to magnify it. A Cross that only operates in the little patch we have fenced off from the whole coherent field of life is a depleted Cross.

And Mysticism, more than any other spiritual movement, has served to recall the theologian to the essential glory of the Cross as the most characteristic expression of the Being of God and not merely a temporary expedient to meet an emergency. The separation of the humiliation of the Son of Man from the glory which He had from the beginning with His Father, of the shame He endured from the joy

that was set before Him, has tended to make our theology unreal and to vulgarise popular religion. Sören Kierkegaard, the deep-souled and eccentric Danish philosopher, has launched the darts of his caustic wit against a popular Protestantism which does its best to forget "that little episode of Calvary" and exhausts itself in lauding and magnifying an exalted Redeemer whom it would have scornfully passed by in the days of His humiliation.[1] The charge is not entirely unfounded. Of faith which becomes contemporaneous with the Crucified and recognises His royalty in His most bitter shame there is all too little. That the Cross should be the Throne and the King of Glory be "reigning from the Tree" is a truth which Protestantism has largely forgotten and Ultramontanism denies daily, though many a humble Christian soul lives by it still.

It is at this point that Gnosticism, for all its distorted vision, voiced a genuine human instinct. Gnosticism perished miserably because it appeared at a time when Christological dogma was as yet at too fluid a stage, and the Church too weak either to absorb the good in it without being swamped by its vicious elements, or to hammer it into a more valid shape. It crumbled to decay before it had reached maturity—a noble clay turned to mud for want of an opposing force strong enough to mould it. But in what survives of Gnostic literature we of to-day may see how tremendous and myriad-faced an impression Jesus made upon the first centuries, and

[1] *Einübung im Christentum*, pp. 189-197.

how deeply the "blazing scandal and flagrant indiscretion of the Cross" had scored itself upon minds to which it was a stumbling-block, but which none the less felt the drawing power of the Crucified. The Gnostic mind revolted from the idea of an Incarnation and a death whose lowliness and sheer, sordid ignominy seemed to it unworthy of God and incompatible with His essential being. This feeling was obviously not peculiar to Gnosticism. It was common to Jewish and pagan opponents of Christianity, whom it moved to reject the Gospel, and to Christian theologians, whom it forced to treat the humiliation of Jesus as a brief, temporal experience—a *kenosis* in the sense of a surrender of essential attributes. Gnosticism, however, took its own most significant way out of the dilemma in the so-called "Gnostic Crucifixion."[1] While the *simulacrum* of Christ is being mocked and crucified, Christ Himself, who cannot suffer, takes His disciples aside and shows them a cross of light and glory of which the cross of wood is but the exoteric symbol for the benefit of such as are "outside the mystery." "Nothing," says the Christ to John, "of the things which they will say of Me, have I suffered." Grotesque as the narrative is, it enshrines a healthy instinct. It represents a heroic attempt to meet and answer the natural protest of the rational man against a humiliation of God which does violence to His essential nature; and it seems to us, on the whole, a worthier solution of the problem than that assumption of a temporary

[1] *The Apocryphal Acts of Paul, Peter, John, Andrew, and Thomas* (ed. Pick), pp. 183-188.

masquerading of God which has for so long defaced popular theology. It expresses that indefeasible conviction of the sincere soul in the presence of Jesus which made Traherne declare centuries later, in words we have already quoted, that all the corn and wine and oil and gold and silver in the world "ministered in an invisible manner to the Son of Man as He hung upon the cross."

It is only slowly that we are coming to recognise that the problem which underlay the Gnostic position is a genuine one—that the candid and aspiring soul must ever revolt against a humiliation of the Incarnate God which is not in entire consonance with His eternal being, and that such labels as "*kenosis*" do not lessen the difficulty by one hair's breadth. Nor can we pretend that the mystics have solved it. Whenever they have attempted to deal with it they have leaned towards the Gnostic interpretation. Yet mystic theology has served to keep the problem before our eyes, and carries within it valuable material for its solution. For it implies that the Cross is not an after-thought of God—a heroic remedy for a desperate emergency—but the corner-stone of creation. If the Christ-process must be repeated in every human soul; if no son of God can be brought to glory except he be crucified with Christ as well as believe in Christ crucified for him; nay, if the whole cosmos must travel to God by way of Calvary, then the Cross is the heart of the universe—is, indeed, none other than that meek omnipotence of God by which chaos is being turned to order and evil to good. Mysticism here adumbrates a theological con-

viction which is gradually coming to its own—that in the life and death of Jesus God is most truly Himself; that in it there is no humiliation which is not entirely "natural" to the unfathomable humility of Divine Love, no *kenosis* which empties it of one fibre of its original and inherent majesty and glory. If we have got beyond the naïve and untenable doctrines of mutually contradictory attributes in God, and realise that He is Love and that His omnipotence, wisdom, and justice are the omnipotence, wisdom, and justice of perfect Love, we must sooner or later arrive at the doctrine of the essential humanity, or rather Christhood, of God, and see in the death of Jesus, not the veiling, but the most perfect manifestation of His glory.

And mystic Christology, unlike the Gnostic type, was born of a deep experimental fellowship with the Crucified. Whatever its defects—and it must at all points be supplemented by the more explicitly evangelical interpretation—it was the theology of those who realised the peace and the conflict, the humiliation and the glory, the joy and the anguish, the severity and the sweetness of the Cross in terms of their personal life. As Principal Forsyth once said of the theology of the Puritans, so it may be said of that of the mystics, that it was graven on their hands. For them there was at bottom only one way of depleting the Cross of Christ—refusing to bear it, and only one way of making that Cross effectual—nailing our lives to it. They allowed the nails of the true Cross to strike through, till in the anguish of that transfixion the world was indeed crucified to them and

they to the world ; and so they uttered their message. "Not with words of wisdom"—nay, with not a few words of folly—they preached their gospel, but with the smiting eloquence of those who bear in their bodies the marks of the Lord Jesus.

CHAPTER XI

MYSTICISM AND ESCHATOLOGY

The eschatology of a nation is always the last part of its religion to experience the transforming power of new ideas and new facts.

CANON CHARLES.

If there be in Thy Eternity, before Thee, some One Body, or Kingdom of Thy children, not a division, not a tribe, not a party, but one that includes all, one that by principles and sympathies in common with all, offers sacrifices of thanksgiving for all, and communicates blessings to all, then I pray, if it seem good in Thy sight, that I may be associated with that Body.

JOHN PULSFORD.

The King's Daughter is all glorious within,
Her clothing of wrought gold sets forth her bliss;
Where the endless choruses of heaven begin
The King's Daughter is;

Perfect her notes in the perfect harmonies;
With tears wiped away, no conscience of sin,
Loss forgotten and sorrowful memories;

Alight with Cherubin, afire with Seraphim,
Lily for pureness, rose for charities,
With joy won and with joy evermore to win,
The King's Daughter is.

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI.

SYNOPSIS

The significance of the problem—The Eschatological School and the "Galilean Gospel"—Mysticism as a solution. I. Should Eschatology be completely transmuted into Mysticism?—Its corrective value—Vicious antithesis between evolution and cataclysm—The true opposition that between two types of final events—The eschatology of Jesus to be interpreted by His filial consciousness—Von Dobschütz on transmuted eschatology—The eschatological element in Mysticism. II. The eschatological element in the doctrine of the Indwelling Christ—Where Christ is, there is the Kingdom—The indwelling implies an ἀποκάλυψις—Without eschatology the experience of timelessness a delusion. III. The mystic doctrine of the Holy Spirit and its eschatological reference—Pre-Reformation Mysticism and its emphasis upon the individual aspect—The post-Reformation conception of a Spirit-created Church—The eschatological principle in the Christian *Ecclesia*. IV. The Doctrine of the Holy Assembly—Sir W. Robertson Nicoll on the catholicity of the mystic Holy Church—Mr. A. E. Waite on its inwardness—The Holy Assembly *not* the Church Invisible—Eckartshausen's *The Cloud upon the Sanctuary*—The eschatology of the Holy Assembly. V. The Mystic Doctrine of the Redemption of the Body—Its connection with Sacramental doctrine—Coventry Patmore on God manifest in the flesh—John Pulsford on transfigured humanity—The "multitudinous" coming of the Son of Man.

CHAPTER XI

MYSTICISM AND ESCHATOLOGY

It is coming to be more and more recognised that the eschatological problem will for a long time to come form the storm-centre not merely of New Testament criticism, but also of theological inquiry in the broadest sense. To those for whom the eschatological theory is identified with the name of Albert Schweitzer this will seem an exaggerated statement. But it must be borne in mind that Schweitzer, while his meteoric brilliance made him the most conspicuous figure in the field, is neither the pioneer nor the most solid and important representative of a movement which still awaits its full development, and that the reaction from his extreme positions, so far from ending the controversy, gave it a new lease of life.

To give even a brief outline of that controversy is impracticable here, and indeed its details do not affect our present considerations. It suffices to remind ourselves that the eschatological school, even at its extremest, produced a salutary effect upon theological thought. It shattered the idyllic convention of what was called "the Galilean Gospel," and planted the Cross on the very shores of Gennesaret. The liberal theology which preceded it made Jesus a winsome preacher of the Kingdom, a lover of birds

and lilies, of children and of homely common life. When at last He saw that clerical prejudice and priestly hatred were bent on His destruction, He accepted the Cross as the test of His loyalty and the crowning opportunity of self-sacrifice. To this the eschatological school opposed a reading of the life of Jesus which made the Cross central. It spoke of One who was conscious of having come into the world only to die, over whose soul a great and imminent catastrophe had cast long shadows, who was, indeed, obsessed with a sense of pending doom. Nurtured in the crude and lurid apocalyptic expectations of Judaism, his Messianic consciousness naturally fitted itself into their mould, and so real and present were they to Him that even His purely ethical teaching was conditioned by them. And so He taught an *Interimsethik*—entirely admirable for those who expected the immediate return of the Son of Man, but lamentably impracticable for citizens of a world destined to last.

For many this new reading of the Gospel shattered not only the Galilean idyll, but their whole conception of Jesus as the perfect Man, leaving them with a Jewish visionary whose teachings must needs be of doubtful value for modern needs. Unable to meet the eschatologists on their own ground, they sought refuge from their conclusions in Mysticism. If the teaching of the Synoptic Jesus was overwhelmingly eschatological, it was transmuted in the Pauline, and still more perfectly in the Johannine, writings into pure Mysticism. Thus New Testament Mysticism became the haven of troubled souls from the unwelcome encroachments of an "eschatological" flood-tide,

and it may be claimed that the present revival of interest in mystical literature on the part of preachers and teachers is largely due to this recoil from an interpretation which would rob the Christian message of its characteristic inwardness and universality.

I

With the critical aspect of the situation we need not concern ourselves here, but a question which extends far beyond merely textual and historical considerations calls for treatment. Is Mysticism really a refuge from eschatology? Does it not include a strong eschatological element, and may not eschatology be as truly a corrective of Mysticism as Mysticism is a solvent of eschatology?

The question does not appeal to the popular religious mind. We have had it ingrained into us by a generation of teachers that eschatology is a crude, unspiritual thing, leading on the intellectual side to a materialistic conception of God, and on the practical to an "other-worldliness" which sings about heaven while grinding the faces of the poor. True, Jesus used the language of Jewish apocalyptic, but He did so out of pedagogic accommodation to His hearers, and invested it with a deep spiritual significance. And so we have come to dismiss all apocalyptic and eschatology as a decidedly regrettable survival.

But was Jewish apocalyptic, even at its crudest, the thing we have so conventionally accepted it to be? Was there nothing in it that attracted the mind of Jesus, no inherent value that commended it to

Him as a fit vehicle of His teaching? Was it a mere accident that the Greek, whose gods were destined to become the decorative figures in eighteenth-century *vers de société* and ornamental parks, had no eschatology and knew only of a golden age in the dim past, while the Hebrews, who were destined to give the world its Christ, had a whole apocalyptic literature and a popular Messianic hope? Is there not at bottom (though usage forbids the application of the term) something eschatological in every manifestation of growth and development? Are not quiet development and cataclysmic upheaval combined in Nature and in man? The adolescent boy is conscious of mental growth. He feels a straining and stretching in his soul, a sense of daily coming nearer—he scarcely knows what; he only knows that such a tension of soul as he feels must tend towards something. Then one day, by some apparently trivial thing, a word, a look, a woman's smile, a lark's song, his whole world is shattered and a new world lies about him. It came in the twinkling of an eye—the New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven. It was a cataclysm, yet he knows that it was also the result of slow growth. Development and cataclysm, growth ending in a leap that bridges years—"*so* shall it be," says the mystic who is always an eschatologist also, "when the Son of Man comes"; that is, when the eye which could not see the ascended Christ suddenly gives place to a new organ of vision which sees "this same Jesus" walking along the old familiar roads, and the amazed and joy-intoxicated soul realises that this sudden, startling change is

the leap at the end of a gradual process. For years the new eye, the new capacity for seeing, has been slowly built up beneath the dark scaffolding of the old. Then suddenly something was broken away, a film was removed, and behold the Son of Man walking on the earth which He had never left. We are not concerned here with the validity or Biblical "soundness" of this particular view of the meaning of the Ascension. The point is that it is at once true Mysticism and genuine eschatology.

To oppose the idea of a gradual growth to a sudden cataclysmic consummation and to call the first mystical and the second eschatological is to fall into the old error of opposing process to event. As we have reminded ourselves in the preceding chapter, every event presupposes a process. Process must manifest itself in events and be a process towards something; events cannot spring from nowhere: they must be expressions of some underlying process. And indeed in such seemingly contradictory Gospel sayings as, "Verily I say unto you, there are some standing here who shall not taste of death until they see the Kingdom of God arrive with power," and, "So is the Kingdom of God as if a man should cast seed on the earth . . . but when the fruit is ripe, straightway he putteth forth the sickle," the opposition is not at all between event and process, but between two types of events—between the immediate arrival of a Kingdom of God falling ready-made from heaven, as it were, and the final establishment of a Kingdom which comes as the end of an inward development. Here, and not in an artificial antithesis between process and event, lies

the crux of the eschatological problem.[1] In its generalised form it may be stated thus : Every spiritually-minded man, and in a deep though not obvious sense the mystic most of all, looks forward to a Divine Event. The question is whether this Divine Event is something ready-made and inherently independent of what has gone before, or whether it is the consummation of a process which not only leads up to it, but is an integral part of it. In other words, does the process which precedes the event bear to it the relation of a finger-post to the village it indicates or that of the seed to the ear of corn? Does it merely herald the coming of the event, or *is* it that coming? In the first case we have an eschatology which is little if anything more than apocalyptic, and which does not necessarily involve any ethical content. In the second, we have an eschatology which is, in fact, a teleology based upon ethical values and informed with an ethical impulse.

For the Christian that Divine Event is what is known as the Kingdom of God interpreted in terms of the consciousness of Jesus ; that is, in the light of the Fatherhood of God and the Saviourhood of Christ. It will be seen at once that for one who so interprets the concept of the Kingdom the eschatological problem, while it has its own place and importance, and while it would be worse than folly to minimise its difficulties, cannot present itself in that sharp and lurid form in which scholars like Schweitzer would have us conceive it. After all, the ultimate question is,

[1] For a succinct and illuminating discussion of the eschatological element in the teaching of Jesus, see Professor Moffatt's *The Theology of the Gospels*, chap. ii.

Are we to interpret the consciousness of Jesus by His eschatological teaching, and that treated with a literalness and lack of imagination which we should be ashamed to apply to the inspired symbolism of any other prophet, or are we to interpret the eschatological element in His teaching by His consciousness of God and of His Sonship, and by the spiritual impression He made upon His contemporaries and those who came after? Or—to narrow the issue down to one crucial point—if for Jesus the forgiveness of sins was the very core and soul of His Gospel of the Kingdom, that which gave His Messianic works of healing their significance and character, then clearly He could not take over the current eschatological forms without so changing their content as to effect a virtual transvaluation. Much is made of the transmutation of eschatology in the Pauline and Johannine writings; is it reasonable, to say the least, to assume that He who was the Source of their inspiration should have brought no appreciably transmuting influence to bear upon the eschatological material He found to His hands?[1] The words of von Dobschütz[2] are worth pondering in this connection. "There is," he says, "in the teaching of Jesus a strong line of what I would call *transmuted eschatology*. I mean eschatology transmuted in the sense that, what was spoken of in Jewish eschatology as to come

[1] I am, of course, aware that in many eschatological passages—notably the discourse in Matt. xxiv.—we have not the words of our Lord as He spoke them, but as affected by an infiltration of Jewish apocalyptic elements into the primitive sources. This does not, however, impair the force of the argument, as the extreme eschatological position is not based upon such passages, which are admitted to be doubtful by leading scholars of the extreme eschatological school.

[2] Quoted by Professor Moffatt in *The Theology of the Gospels*, p. 84.

in the last days is taken here as already at hand in the lifetime of Jesus ; transmuted at the same time in the other sense that what was expected as an external change is taken inwardly ; not all people seeing it but Jesus' disciples becoming aware of it."

Turning to the Christian mystic, we find that the *differentia* which distinguishes him from his fellow-Christians is that he interprets the idea of the Kingdom of God predominantly in terms of the indwelling Christ. Viewed on the surface, he carries the transmutation of eschatology to the point where it ceases to be eschatology and becomes pure Mysticism. But in reality his most deeply mystical convictions carry an eschatological principle which, so far from marring their spirituality, serves to keep them within the realm of moral reality. In four mystical doctrines especially may this principle be traced: the doctrines of the Indwelling Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Holy Assembly, and the Redemption of the Body.

II

For the Christian Mystic Christ *is* the Kingdom. When Jesus said " The Kingdom of God is at hand " and " The Kingdom of God is within you " He spoke with literal truth, for *He* was knocking at the door, *He* was dwelling with His own, and where Christ is, there is the Kingdom. The mystic knows that the Kingdom of Heaven is in the timeless present, for Christ dwells in his heart by the time-annihilating energy of faith. He knows also that the Kingdom will come at the end of long sore travail and tribula-

tion, for the Christ in him is not only the ever-present Treasure of the soul, but the Hope of glory; not only the Source of the soul's life, but also its Critic, whose unerring finger ever points to what ought to be but is not yet. Unless he be a false mystic who mistakes the manifestations of natural religiosity or erotic emotion for the operation of the indwelling Christ, his consciousness of the presence of Christ within will increasingly imply an expectation of the Christ to come. To him the coming of Christ is not the coming of One who had been absent, but the perfected manifestation and final unveiling of a Presence that has always been the inspiration and comfort of the faithful soul. To say that Christ dwells with us here and now is to come short of the mystic realisation of His presence. For him who knows Christ within his soul, there is neither "here" nor "now," for he has surmounted time and space. This timelessness, however, does not contradict the eschatological principle, for, as we have already seen, it is only in passing through time and being fulfilled in time that the love of God is known to be beyond time and change; and this holds true also of men's realisation of the timeless present. It is not by treating time and space as illusions, and therefore all eschatology as unspiritual, that true inwardness is attained, but by humble and devout intimacy with Him who wrought out our redemption in time and space, and whose present comfort in the deep places of the heart speaks of a coming "in the clouds of heaven." To transmute the eschatology of Him who is to come completely into the Mysticism of the Christ within is to open the door to every form of

unethical, if not anti-ethical, spirituality and to close it upon reality. The Kingdom within cannot be realised by ignoring the fact that we have not yet attained. "Beloved, now are we the sons of God; and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." The mystic may, in rare moments of vision, anticipate that consummation. St. Bernard, the Victorines, Blessed Angela de Foligno, Lady Julian, Ruysbroeck, Richard Rolle, and all great mystics of the explicitly visionary type, knew themselves in moments of transcendent illumination to be looking with transformed and glorified eyes into the unveiled face of Christ. But they did not profane these moments of vision by trying to give them a permanence in time which did not belong to them, and by some act of mental juggling to persuade themselves that they had finally passed beyond the phenomenal to the ultimately real. Their way was rather to see the sins and imperfections of their pilgrimage loom black against the flashlight picture of attained bliss, and to let the fugitive glory of their vision drive them with a deeper repentance and a more whole-hearted surrender to that Cross which alone makes the saint.

III

At first sight it would seem as if the doctrine of the Holy Spirit were the most uneschatological of all New Testament convictions. It might, indeed, be taken as marking the final transmutation of escha-

tology in the Fourth Gospel, where "eschatology as such has practically vanished," and where "the grand vision which mystic faith and communion inspired of life present yet eternal, springing from the sacramentally sustained union of the Christian with God in Christ or by the Spirit, replaces the older and authentic expectations of a Kingdom to be and a visible judgment on a transfigured earth, and the local and national is absorbed in the human and universal vista."[1] If Mysticism is nothing else than "the experience of the Holy Spirit" or "the realisation of the Spirit of holiness,"[2] it might seem to follow that the mystic has no room for eschatology in his deeply individualistic, inward and "pneumatic" conception of religion.

And such a view is apparently confirmed by a study of pre-Reformation Mysticism. In the literature of that fruitful period, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, where it is formally stated at all, is nothing else than the intensification and extension of the doctrine of the Christ within individualistically conceived. The Spirit is He who makes that indwelling real and effective. He is not conceived of as coming to indemnify us for our Lord's absence, but to convince us of His abiding presence and to make His inward ministry available for the believer. One important fact, however, is usually forgotten in such an interpretation of Mysticism, namely, that the inward and often exaggeratedly individualistic conception of the indwelling Spirit which some take to be central in Mysticism was primarily a reaction against the insti-

[1] E. W. Winstanley, *Jesus and the Future*, p. 353.
[2] R. C. Moberly, *Atonement and Personality*, p. 312.

tutionalism and externally-conceived eschatology of the mediæval Church. The pre-Reformation mystics had discovered, as a pearl of great price, the value of the individual soul. Over against the institutionalism of a Church of which they remained loyal and devoted members and the unspirituality of an eschatology whose main features they never challenged, they were moved to bear witness to the individuality, inwardness, and secrecy of God's approach to man and man's response to God. That testimony, with all its force of one-sided emphasis, is contained in their writings, but behind these writings lies a willing and, on the whole, uncritical acceptance of ecclesiastical dogmas and institutions. Their conviction of the inwardness of religion existed side by side with an inherited belief in an external and cataclysmic eschatological system which they took for granted.

It was otherwise, however, with post-Reformation mystics. They felt themselves to be under no vow of allegiance to any visible Church, Catholic or Protestant, to owe no filial obligation which excluded criticism. They challenged Churches and dogmas in the name of the free and liberating Spirit of God. They were, on the face of it, spiritual free-lances, if not rebels ; and their utterances breathed a virile and indomitable determination not to let any Church consistory or council rob them of the liberty wherewith Christ had made them free or deny to them the inalienable privilege of every Christian soul to "prophesy" as the Spirit moved it.[1] Yet, on

[1] For a valuable original study of post-Reformation Mysticism see Rufus M. Jones, *Spiritual Reformers in the 16th and 17th Centuries.*

looking into the facts, we find that these freemen of the Spirit were not at all the individualists so many assume them to have been. In spite of a reaction from every type of institutionalism which led them to imagine that spirit could dispense with form, they proceeded to form groups which were really Churches in a sense in which the pre-Reformation mystical groups were not. They were not merely societies of *illuminati* which asked for little more than to be allowed to follow the gleam in peace, but societies which were conscious of an apostolate and claimed the authority of the Spirit for their corporate testimony. Their most important contribution to Christian thought was their unformulated and almost unconscious witness to the *social* activity of the Holy Spirit. They recalled Christendom to a truth to which no Church born merely of a protest against Rome could have recalled it—to the fact that at Pentecost the Spirit came not upon one individual here and another there, but upon a company of men all in one accord and in one place—that it found the disciples a group of like-minded individuals and left them a Church. The Spiritual Reformers were individualists, if you like; yet, by one of the strange and significant inconsistencies with which history is sown, they revived the Pentecostal doctrine of the Church which stands for the passing of individualism, the breaking away of the hard edges of human personality, and for new and wonderful possibilities of expression and fellowship. Corporate prayer (which, be it remembered, is a very different thing from either saying prayers in unison or following the extemporised prayers of a leader)

was born in the Quaker meeting and in the conventicle. Here also lies the justification of the free exercise of prophecy and other gifts of the Spirit. So profound and dominant was the consciousness of a call to mutual comfort and inspiration that the Spiritual Reformers, like the Apostles, judged all gifts by their power unto edification. "I would have you all speak with tongues," they exclaimed with St. Paul, "but rather that ye should prophesy . . . *that the Church may be edified.*"

But the moment the descent of the Holy Spirit is conceived of as something more than individual illumination and inspiration and is interpreted in terms of an *ecclesia*, the eschatological principle is granted. A Church involves a commission, an apostolate. The Body of Christ is Christ's instrument, His organ, and that implies purpose. A Church without an eschatology in that sense degenerates into a coterie of esoteric initiates, an inner circle which possesses the Kingdom of God as the drunken man possesses a fortune—in a delirious or cataleptic dream. Inwardness which does not react upon and transmute the outward is a poisonous drug. But such is not the true mystic doctrine. As the Holy Spirit represents at once the intensifying and the extension of the Christ in man, so the Spirit-created Church represents the continuation and extension of the Incarnation. She is the Body wherewith the ascended Christ clothes Himself for His continuous dwelling in the world; the Body in which He knocks at the door of an unwilling and rebellious world; the Body in which He suffers and offers His Atoning Sacrifice for all mankind.

To make such an indwelling and redemption an inward thing in the sense of excluding its ἀποκάλυψις and its realisation in terms of a Kingdom of God upon earth is to rob it of its ethical significance.

IV

This leads us on to the doctrine of the Holy Assembly. As time wore on, and even the most spiritual of the post-Reformation communities tended to formalism and gradually to decadence, mystic souls turned more and more to that Church Invisible which is for ever secure "from the contagion of the world's slow stain," and whose walls shelter ten thousand times ten thousand of redeemed ones whom no Church or party ever owned. And as mystics sat more and more loosely to the Biblicism of the Reformation theology, and speculation once more reared its head, not under the protection of Mother Church this time, but under the more doubtful ægis of Gnostic and other theosophical traditions, the Cabalistic doctrine of the Holy Assembly was explored afresh.[1] This doctrine, while it may be construed in the sense of a vicious esotericism, is, as Sir W. Robertson Nicoll justly observes, "a testimony catholic to all Mysticism. It is concerned with a withdrawn brotherhood in whose hands the experimental knowledge of God has remained and has increased. . . .

[1] The most popular exposition of this difficult doctrine is found in Eckartshausen's well-known tractate, *The Cloud upon the Sanctuary*, while its deeper and more exhaustive unfolding is enshrined in a largely anonymous and not easily accessible literature, which has been brilliantly utilised in the profound and erudite investigations of Mr. A. E. Waite.

They [the mystics] have recognised that the Church visible is a stage on the way to the esoteric Church, the Holy Assembly that has hoped and worked through the ages. . . . The door of that Assembly is never closed. Through it there pass continually men of all sects and denominations—those wise and enlightened spirits who know that they have not reached finality and keep passing on through stage after stage in search of the Absolute, the Ultimate, the Everlasting. . . . It is one of the chief alleviations of the sorrow of earthly disunion that we may ever and anon come to the surprised and joyful consciousness that the brother who is bearing another name and is fighting in another army is in reality one with us in the Mystical Holy Church. . . . Wherefore it is the wont of mystics to claim this fellowship, and to exact recognition 'in all houses, temples and tarrying places of the Fraternity.'" [1]

Mr. Waite, in his admirable introduction to Miss de Steiger's translation of *The Cloud upon the Sanctuary*, emphasises certain marks and characteristics of the Holy Assembly not readily discerned by the beginner. He points out, for instance, that the Holy Assembly is not, as some have supposed, a "corporate body existing merely within the Church and controlling or leading it from a specific local centre in concealment." [2] It is not, in fact, a magnified secret society or lodge. He also reminds us that it is distinguished from the Church Invisible or the Communion of Saints in that it possesses not merely "a concurrent

[1] *The Garden of Nuts*, pp. 69, 71, 73, 74.
[2] *The Cloud upon the Sanctuary*, Introduction, p. xiv.

harmony of mind in Christ Jesus,"[1] but also a distinctive common consciousness. The inwardness of the Holy Assembly—an inwardness which, however, does not preclude a purified eschatological element—is well expressed by Eckartshausen himself in his classical treatise. "All exterior societies," he says, and in this he includes mystical lodges, "subsist only in proportion as this society [the Holy Assembly] communicates its spirit thereto. . . . If it be necessary that true members should meet together, they find and recognise each other with perfect certainty. No disguise can be used, neither hypocrisy nor dissimulation could hide the characteristic qualities of this society, because they are too genuine. . . . Anyone can look for the entrance, and any man who is within can teach another to seek for it; but only he who is ripe can arrive inside. . . . He who is ripe is joined to the chain, perhaps often where he thought least likely, and at a point of which he knew nothing himself."[2]

It is impossible to do more here than touch the outmost fringe of an obscure and weighty subject, but this much is obvious—that such a doctrine as that of the Holy Assembly, if rightly discerned, may lead us to the house not made with hands, and that if it be profaned by a superficial and pseudo-esoteric interpretation, it will lure us into the twilight country of artificial adeptship and cheap theosophical speculation. Against this danger Eckartshausen and all true hierophants of this mystery attempt to

[1] *The Cloud upon the Sanctuary*, p. xxxi.
[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 26, 28-29.

secure us by laying overwhelming stress upon the inward and spiritual character of the Holy Assembly. But none the less the doctrine has a distinctly eschatological aspect, which is tersely stated by Eckartshausen himself when he declares that the Holy Assembly is "the society whose members form a theocratic republic which one day will be the Regent Mother of the whole world."[1] And this is further emphasised when he treats of the passing away of the exterior Church not merely as the absorption of what is abiding within it by the Holy Assembly, but as part of the great consummation when the Son shall yield up the Kingdom to the Father and God shall be all in all. Here again it is the eschatological principle which gives ethical tone to the doctrine, and preserves it from the taint of quasi-esoteric self-sufficiency and selfishness. The Holy Assembly is not merely the inmost circle and hidden sanctuary of elect souls: it is the earnest and guarantee of a world-wide redemption, the mountain to which all peoples and tribes shall gather. It is not the perfecter of the race—one only is the Perfecter of humanity, even Christ Jesus; on the contrary, it needs the whole redeemed human family of God for its perfecting.

V

The return of the later mystics to the venerable doctrine of the Holy Assembly was born of a reaction against the gradual externalisation of even the most

[1] *The Cloud upon the Sanctuary*, p. 29.

spiritually conceived religious societies. The rehabilitation of the doctrine of the Redemption of the Body originated in the opposite movement—in a recoil from the essentially Manichæan spirituality which secularised the temple of the Holy Ghost in the supposed interest of the altar. The awakening social conscience of Christendom and a new conception of human personality produced a twofold result. In not a few quarters it combated one secularisation by another—it degraded the Church into a social organisation and a philanthropic agency. Again and again the representatives of social Christianity defeated their noblest ends by forgetting that if the body is to be redeemed at all, it can only be through the soul—a truth which the mystics, on the other hand, were never tempted to forget. They, too, were touched by the new social feeling. They, too, realised, in their own fashion, that man is not an impervious individual but the member of a body, and that true union with the Head involves a genuine and vital sympathy with Him in His care for the bodies as well as the souls of men. And with such a conviction increasingly strong within them, they did not hesitate to take their full share in the social and philanthropic movements of their time. But gradually—(and it must be admitted that the immediate impulse came largely from their inherent interest in alchemy, magic, and theosophy)—the idea of a transmutation of the body and the emergence of a new type of humanity took root in the minds of many of the later Christian mystics. In the very nature of things this doctrine contains many purely speculative elements, and any attempt at a hard-and-fast formula-

tion, such as finds favour with theosophical mystics who affect the dead language of alchemy, must be sternly deprecated. The roots of the doctrine are, however, deeply embedded in the soil of Old Testament prophecy and Pauline Christology and eschatology, and in the Church's confession of faith in the resurrection of the body she gives an eschatological form to the mystic doctrine of the redemption of the body with its own subtler eschatological reference.

In as far as Christian Mysticism remained loyal to the Visible Church of Christ, it was guarded against a one-sided spiritualism, in spite of its share in the mediæval contempt of the body. If it depreciated the body of man, it at least magnified the Body of Christ. Dora Greenwell voices the sane and discerning temper of the best mystics when she reminds us that "it is not by rejecting what is formal, but by interpreting it, that we advance in true spirituality; the Spirit of God, even as the spirit of a man, works, and as far as we yet understand the conditions of our being, *lives* only through 'the body which has been prepared for it.' By things which we can see and hear, by things which our hands can handle, by words and forms, by doctrines and institutions men live, and *in* them is the life of man. For it is neither by that which is merely natural, nor by that which is purely spiritual, that man's complex nature is nourished and sustained; he lives neither by bread alone, nor yet upon angels' food, but upon that in which the properties of each are included, *the Bread which came down from heaven to give life unto the world.*" [1]

[1] *The Patience of Hope*, pp. 70-71.

And while the later doctrine of the redemption of the body received its outward stimulus from the theosophical speculations which were in the air, it, no less than the doctrine of Cosmic Redemption, had its source not in the speculative impulse, but in the mystic's personal experience of redeeming grace. Realising that body and soul were not separable quantities, and that salvation comes by the personal touch of Christ upon the receptive heart of man, the mystic also realised that the soul cannot so touch Christ without the body sharing in that redemptive contact. This follows, indeed, from the sacramental doctrine which has always distinguished the main stream of Mysticism from its backwaters. The question of specific sacramental dogma does not affect the issue. Whatever dogmatic position the individual mystic may or may not hold, it is his conviction that the most vital and intimate relation between himself and his Redeemer is a continuous assimilation or " eating into himself " of His substance and being transubstantiated into His likeness. Not thinking, prayer or meditation, not dutiful obedience or ethical harmony of wills, but a contact which can only be expressed by saying that it is a permeation with the Body and Blood of Christ constitutes the essence of mystic communion with God. Such sacramental contact is, of course, not confined to sacramental observance ; a Quaker may (though he rarely does) hold this conviction. It consists not in partaking of the Eucharist, but in a Eucharistic life ; and thus for the Catholic mystic the reservation of the consecrated Host upon the altar is the outward symbol of the abiding inward and sacra-

mental presence of Christ. It is only too easy to construe such expressions as "inoculation with the body of Christ" in the sense of that "pharmacological superstition" whereby the Eucharist has been degraded in the Church of Rome, and which, in another form, is characteristic of many heterodox cults of the New Thought order; but the sense in which the mystic understands them is far other. He believes that the same Spirit who formed that Resurrection-body of Jesus which is the firstfruits of our resurrection will also, not through any materialistically-conceived contact of matter with matter, but through His spiritual impact upon us, build up within the scaffolding of our mortal bodies that glorified body which is the building we have of God, eternal in the heavens.

Here lies the justification of St. Paul's plea for the consecration of our bodies to God. There can be no holding back of the flesh which is not in a far more real sense a holding back of the soul. It is the carnal *mind* that spells death. And, says the mystic in effect, if we offer our bodies to be the temples of the Holy Spirit, think you that generating and energising Spirit will remain inactive? Will He not set His stamp on the clay? Nay, will He not rather, working from within, evolve our immortal body, the new house of our humanity, out of the old? That flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God has no hard, literal significance for the mystic who believes that not only our spiritual being, but even the Infinite Being of God, owes something to flesh and blood, seeing that it was through the Flesh and Blood of the

Son of God that the Divine essence which is Love was made manifest and so perfected. It is because the true mystic believes in an Incarnation which was not the mere putting on of a fleshly garment, nor the submission of the Divine to the humiliation of the flesh, that he also believes in the "interior organisation" of redeemed man in Christ's image by being built up inwardly in body as well as in soul. Coventry Patmore, whose writings abound in hints and glimpses of that mysterious craving of spirit for conjunction with that which is not spirit, pleads for this conception when he insists that Incarnation must be regarded "not as an historical event which occurred two thousand years ago, but as an event which is renewed in the body of everyone who is in the way to the fulfilment of his original destiny,"[1] and repeatedly emphasises that "redemption and transfiguration of the senses" which come from "participation in Christ's spiritual Body." The spiritual alchemy and transubstantiation which is the essence of the mystic conception of the redemption of the body is not merely a spiritualisation of magical beliefs, a Christianised revival of the dream of an Elixir of Life, though it has often been cast in those forms, but a corollary of the faith which sees in Jesus the Resurrection and the Life—the great Recreator who can restore to unimagined beauty and vigour the body that has lain in the grave for three days. And while such a conception is hedged about with difficulties, it yet contains material which, if patiently and cautiously worked

[1] *The Rod, the Root, and the Flower*, "Homo," xix.

upon, may yield a most valuable contribution to Christian thought.

But the redemption of the individual body carries with it the emergence of a new humanity, and this constitutes the characteristic eschatology of this type of Mysticism. The inward transmutation of the individual becomes the earnest and firstfruits of a transmuted humanity. And as in the individual the spiritual body is built up within the scaffolding of the old, so within the scaffolding of Churches and States there is being built up the mystic Kingdom of God—profoundly inward and spiritual, and *therefore* ever tending to transmute the outward by incarnating itself in it. The outward manifestation, so far from being a degradation of the inward, is its most characteristic expression.

We may let John Pulsford expound the doctrine at this point in his own inimitable fashion. Speaking of that coming Kingdom which "is being built of secret materials and by secret builders within the scaffolding and present appearance of things," he says, "As this kingdom presses itself down into the souls of men and into the inner spirit of the elements, there cannot but be agitation and change upon change. Fury in the elements, commotion in nations, and perplexity in men's minds are spoken of by Christ as signs of the motion and progress of His kingdom. . . . By a law more fixed than that of ocean-tides, do streams of Divine influence, direct from Christ, flow into all whose eyes and thoughts are turned to Him. . . ." [1] His conviction of the gradual

[1] *The Supremacy of Man*, pp. 223, 224, 228.

on-coming of a Kingdom whose encroachments nothing can stay is based upon the mystic doctrine of the Christ within. "Having involved Himself, sunk Himself, in Man, He involves Himself in all history," and to receive Christ is to receive the Kingdom.

In common with Coventry Patmore, Pulsford dwells much upon a bridal dispensation when a receptive humanity, wonderfully quickened in mind and heart, and with senses chastened to celestial keenness, will repair to that great Feast on the Mountain of God which Isaiah adumbrated. In his eschatology the element of joy preponderates. "To constitute a feast," he says, "there must be much more than enough. The necessaries of life are not a feast; ordinary fare is not a feast. We take for granted that at a great festival there will be not only luxuries, but a superabundance. We bring together delicacies from the ends of the earth for a special feast. Fragrance must be there; floral wonders must be there; music must be there, and every art. The idea of a feast is not the appeasement of hunger, but the liberal refreshment of the whole man; not of the spirit only, but also of the senses and the soul. . . . The Divine and the sensuous will not be divided as now. The pleasures of the senses will be deeper and intenser than at present, and the exercises of the soul and spirit be more generously embodied; but every exhilaration of human life will be purified from all admixture of corruption or dregs. The 'lees' will be a dead, quiescent subsidence, and the wine of the soul a 'well-refined joy, full of nature, full of humanity, and full of God.'" [1]

[1] *The Supremacy of Man*, pp. 267, 269.

Thus mystic eschatology is seen to reproduce that wondrous interweaving of the temporal and the eternal, the natural and the spiritual, which is the groundwork of humanity, perfectly revealed in the sacred humanity of the Son of God. And while the mystic theologian has often been lured into the doubtful realm of theosophical speculation, the central feature of his eschatology is conceived in the spirit of evangelical doctrine. It is nothing else than the triumph of the Father's seeking and redeeming love "in and through the whole motherly and missionary body of the Incarnation." It is the consummation not of an evolutionary process, but of the saving activity of Christ. It is not so much man achieving his destiny as the Son of Man seeing of the travail of His soul and being satisfied. It is not humanity climbing the throne of God, but the Son of Man descending multitudinously in a redeemed and glorified race.

CONCLUSION

CONCLUSION

We have sought to consider Mysticism from a variety of aspects and to relate it to cognate fields of life and thought. We have reminded ourselves that in its case, no less than in the case of any other spiritual movement, the Apostolic injunction to try the spirits must be followed at every step. We have also seen that, taken in its totality, Mysticism is not the pearl of great price for which the wise merchantman of the spirit is ever searching ; it is rather a wide and stony field wherein he must dig diligently to find goodly pearls and where the deceptive and worthless lies nearest the surface. Our chief business has been with its underlying thought of God, its basal doctrine of salvation, and we have found that if Mysticism has contributed and will yet contribute much to the development of Christian doctrine, it is because the evangelical doctrine of Redemption is its formative principle, as the soul's experience of redemption is its vital impulse. We speak here of Christian Mysticism, for it is our conviction that while there are many mansions in our Father's house, and the Sufi saint or the God-intoxicated Fakir may be our forerunners on the way to God, it yet remains true that only as dominated by specifically Christian convictions can Mysticism bring to us an inwardness which carries within it no peril of delusion, a spirituality which does

not menace our ethical life, and an absorption in the Divine which does not destroy the sacredness of our personality, the reality of our freedom.

I

It is because Christian Mystics have often laid more emphasis upon their Mysticism than upon their Christianity that we find a theologian of commanding eminence asking if the true badge of spirituality is really "a *lex insita*, an inner light, mystic individualism, and quietist piety which are co-equated with the historic Word," or if it is " historic faith founded on fact, energising in love, and working by constitutional progress. Which is the way of the Spirit —subjective illuminism with its shifting lights, or objective revelation in an ever-fresh and growing experience ? Is it to-day's vagrant insight, or yesterday's Apostolic inspiration, good for to-day and for ever ? "[1]

An utterance such as this is, of course, open to a charge of antithetical trifling, and it might be pointed out that subjective illuminism, unless it be pathological, involves objective revelation. But even a cursory acquaintance with mystical literature reveals the fact that the error of vicious antithesis lies primarily at the door not of the critics of Mysticism, but of such mystics—and there were not a few of them—who opposed their untutored guesses and undisciplined fancies to the Apostolic Gospel and who co-equated their febrile visions with the historic Word. It is not

[1] P. T. Forsyth, *The Principle of Authority*, p. 272.

orthodoxy we are jealous for here, but the validity of Mysticism itself. History teaches us that wherever a professedly Christian Mysticism has substituted its own intuitions for the historic revelation, it has not only failed to commend itself to the Christian consciousness but, what is far more serious, to redeem its own pledges. Dr. Forsyth is entirely right when he reminds us that "Christian mysticism reposes not on the depths of subliminal being, which give no footing for any authority that royalises life, but upon the miracle of the forgiven conscience of the world and its holy redemption." [1]

But we have also seen how, in its classic type, Christian Mysticism has been and remained centrally and profoundly Christian. We have seen how not only its fundamental doctrines, but also its more tentative and speculative positions, spring ultimately from the experience of redemption in Christ Jesus. That so much in mystical doctrine is still vague and nebulous is largely due to the inhospitable attitude of the theologian. Instead of co-operating with the mystic by bringing his firmer grasp and wider knowledge to bear upon these fluid intuitions, and, wherever possible, helping to bring them out of the penumbra of thought into its illuminated focus, Christian theologians have been and are content to dismiss them as "theosophy." And if it had been their deliberate purpose to encourage and foster questionable theosophemes, they could not have adopted an attitude more likely to do so. Conscious of being despised as a vague dreamer by the official theologian, the theo-

[1] *The Principle of Authority*, p. 470.

sophically-inclined mystic tends to regard himself as a martyr for spiritual liberty in face of a tyrannous tradition, and to prosecute his wildest speculations with redoubled vigour as a sacred obligation in the interests of freedom. Thus speculations which otherwise would either have been nipped in the bud or solidly grounded and fruitfully developed become as rank and poisonous weeds in the mystic garden.

II

Our main concern, however, as we finally survey the field, is to inquire what is its most precious and important yield for the sorely vexed and baffled Christian soul of to-day and for a Church in breathless conflict with hostile forces without and with more deadly foes within. That inquiry is generally met by the general statement that Mysticism recalls us from the institutional to the spiritual, from externality to inwardness, from ritual to communion, from creed to life. But we have so long juggled with spatial terms such as " outward " and " inward," opposing the two halves of one whole and putting asunder what God has joined, that an answer in terms of mere inwardness must prove misleading and involve a dreary tussle with endless logomachies. We would rather say that, among many treasures, the pearl of great price that is hid for us in the field of Mysticism is *simple devotion and humble, loving intimacy with Jesus as the secret of the mystic knowledge of God and the mystic communion with God.*

The great genuine Christian mystics were, above all

things, men and women who had that experimental knowledge of God for which our generation is once more athirst. And the secret of this knowledge—often veiled in philosophical, theosophical, and magical terminology in their more ambitious writings, but always patent in their lives and in their devotional utterances—was their personal intimacy with Jesus Christ. Here lies the reason of our failures in the spiritual life, here the solution to our most complex and ramified problems. If the mystics have any central and specific message to our age, it is that true inwardness, deep and habitual simplicity of soul, purity and clearness of intention, fixity of purpose, splendour of courage, superb generosity of love, heroism that ventures and throws its all into the scale, cannot be had in their fulness and abiding potency, except through personal, devoted, habitual communion with Jesus Christ. They tell us that to those who know Jesus with the deep understanding of adoring love, prayer becomes an apostolate; the devotional life a fruitful field of untold expanse and potency; the daily round one continuous, uncalculating response to Love Incarnate. To love Jesus simply and constantly has ever been the mystic's most "liberal education" in the science of God, and wherever he has thought to transcend that personal relationship in the interests of a supposed spiritual immediacy, he has fallen from true communion with God and failed of valid spiritual achievement. Outside that relationship, the hiddenness of the mystic life degenerates into abstraction and ineffectiveness, instead of being the bracing tonic atmosphere of dynamic activity. Love

becomes a perilous sentiment, faith a presumption, vision a fancy. Only the redeemed soul's intimacy with Jesus can create a devotion which will bear translation into the stern and rigid necessities of the consecrated will.

Closely allied to this central impulse of Mysticism is that sacramental conviction we have touched upon so often. The mystic not only lives with Christ, he lives by Him and upon Him. His message to us is that while sacramental theories may differ, the sacramental life is the immutable condition of the Christian's communion with God. Nothing else can give that sure power of soul, nothing else that intensity and vicariousness of sympathy which come of living in mystic and sacramental union with Christ.

III

And at this point the testimony of Mysticism to the soul's habitual converse and communion with Christ as the indispensable condition of its life in God merges into a testimony to the Church Catholic and holy as the mystic Body of Christ.

The doctrine of the Holy Assembly as "a withdrawn brotherhood in whose hands the experimental knowledge of God remained and increased" has its unique value; but for the Christian mystic it is, after all, not the last word upon the Church. Its harmony and wholeness jar the heart that is attuned to the brokenness of Christ. If St. Catherine of Siena prayed that she might, in her measure, bear the sins of a heedless world; if the theosophical mystic, John G.

Gichtel, besought God that, since he was unworthy to be an anathema for his brethren, he might at least suffer the loss of all things that they might be saved, surely the Bride and Mystic Body of Christ must be smitten with a like pity and a like passion for self-oblation. With the gradual passing of the individualist phase of Mysticism there dawned upon it once more the vision of a Church which is not so much a school and temple of wisdom as an organ of atonement and redemption. Realising the rich and age-long infusion of grace into the Body of Christ which every Christian soul is called to share, and to which it is its duty to contribute in its measure, the mystic also realises that opportunity of a corporate filling up of what is lacking of the sufferings of Christ which is the Church's everlasting glory. And so, after a long and dreary excursion into the wilderness of subjective speculation, separatist piety and morbid spirituality, the mystic is turning his face back towards the Church that he must needs be patient with, remembering her patience with him in past ages. And the gift he bears in his hands is the long-lost conviction that it is only into a broken Body that a lost and sorrowful world will come, that it is only into a pierced side that a perplexed humanity will thrust its hands, that the Church must be crucified with Christ and refuse to come down from the Cross until her travail is consummated. Herein, and not merely in any doctrinal or institutional reforms, lies the remedy for her present debility and dismemberment.

Torn by conflicting philosophies and theologies, lured by a thousand will-o'-the-wisps of pseudo-

mystical cults, helpless between a world that has lost its way and a Church which seems bereft of all power to guide, where shall the soul find anchorage and renewal? The great company of Christian mystics answer, In personal, sacramental, unbroken communion with Christ. And we know they speak truly. Such communion alone can remake the soul; it alone can recreate the Church. It is the soul of Mysticism, the secret of its highest wisdom, the impulse of its most divine adventure.

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